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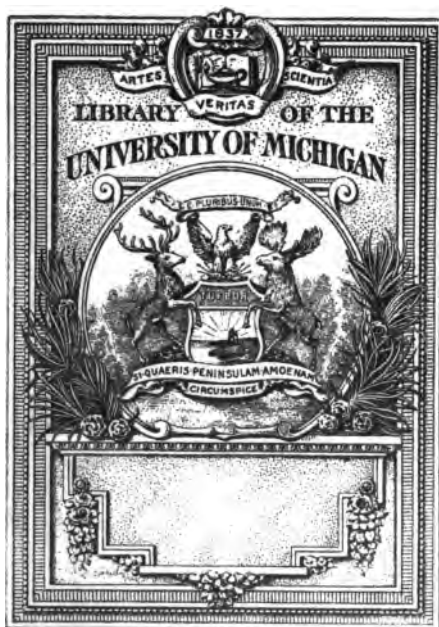
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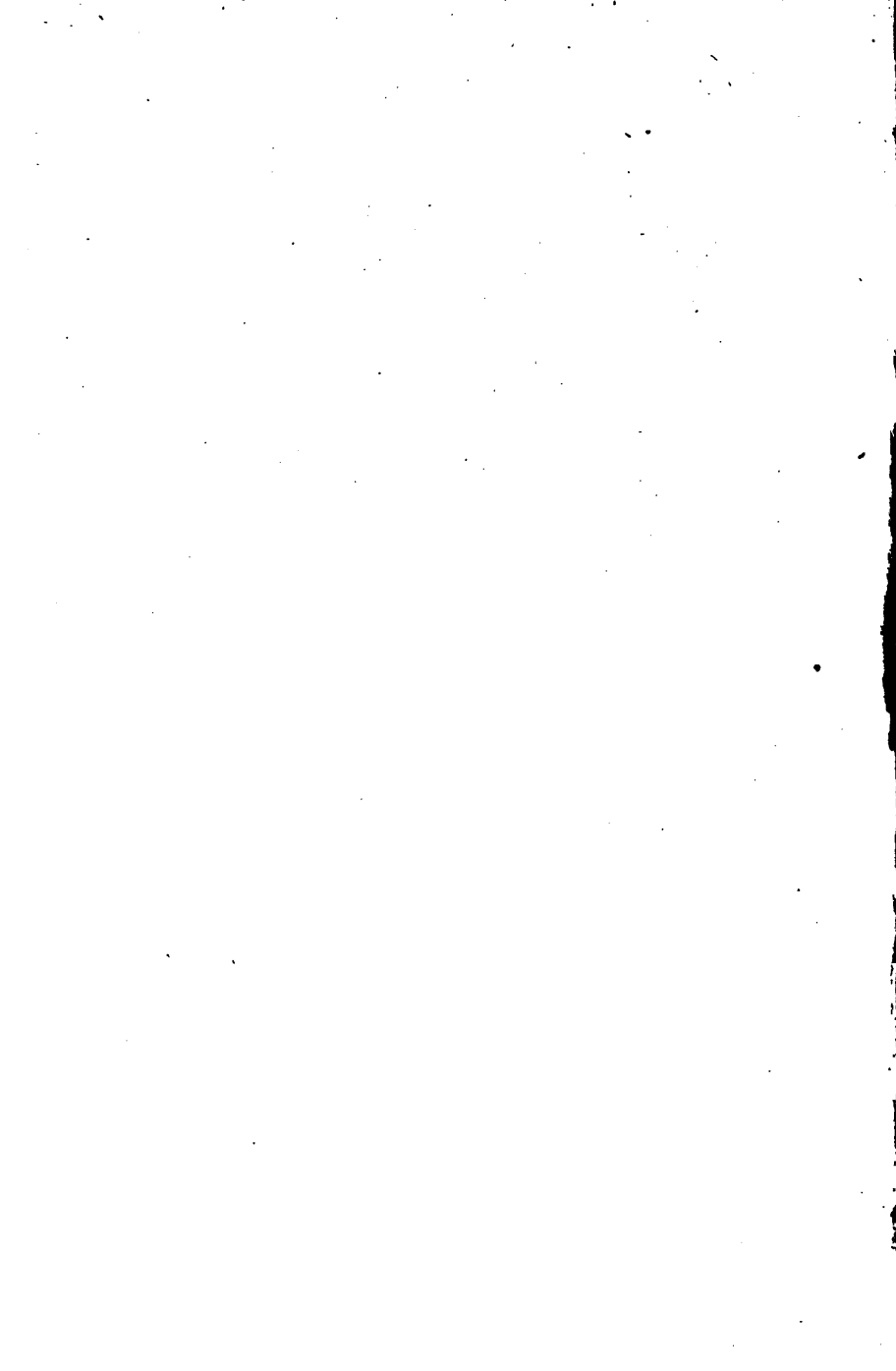
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THE NEW PRINCE FORTUNATUS.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

"A PRINCESS OF THULE," "MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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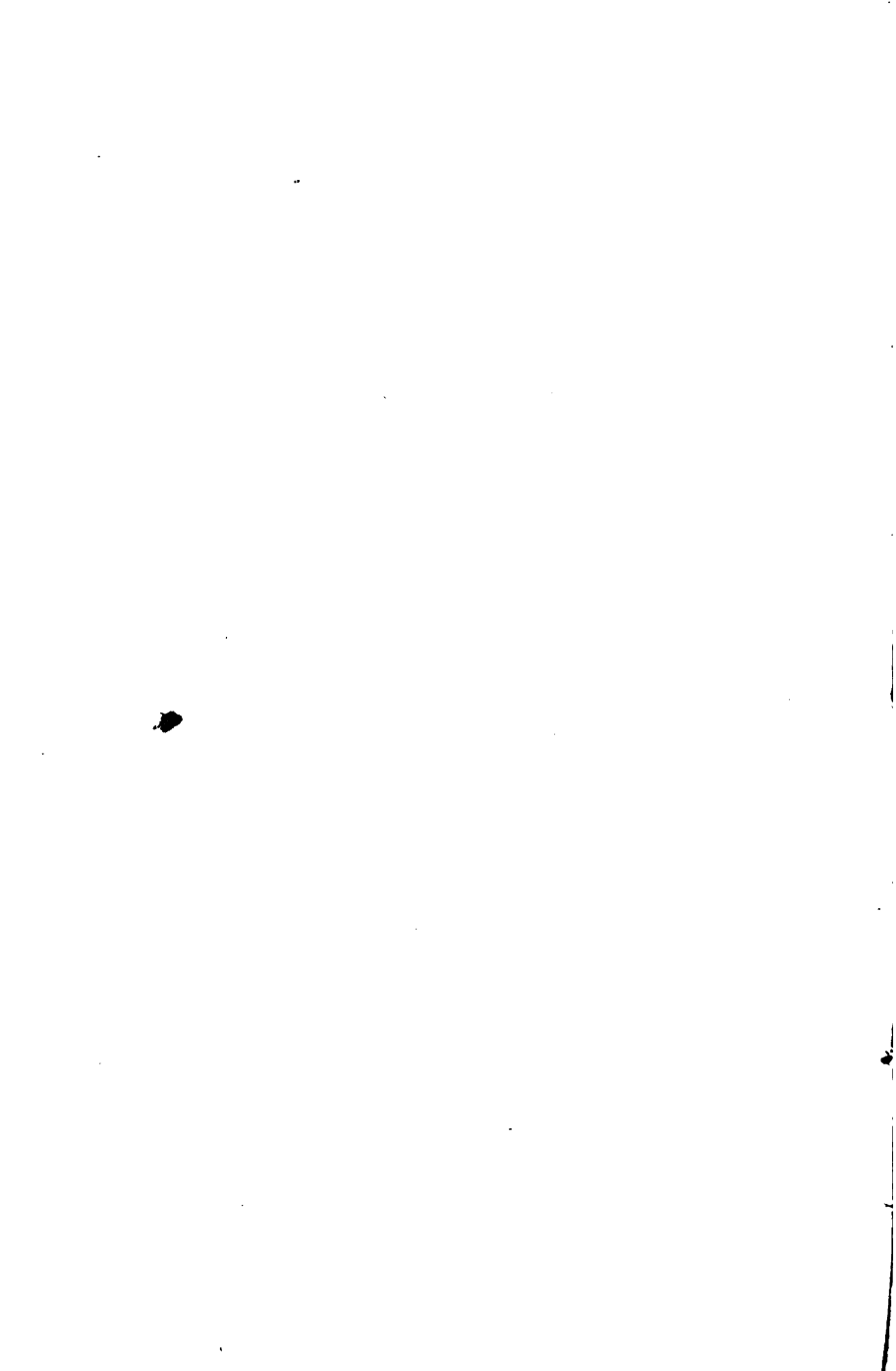
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THE NEW PRINCE FORTUNATUS.

CHAPTER I.

AN INVOCATION.

ALL his vague, wild, impracticable hopes and schemes had suddenly received their death-blow; but there was nothing worse than that; he himself (as he imagined) had been dealt no desperate wound. For one thing, flattered and petted as this young man had been, he was neither unreasoning nor vain; that a woman should have refused to marry him did not seem to him a monstrous thing; she was surely within her right in saying no; while, on the other hand, he was neither going to die of chagrin nor yet to plan a melodramatic revenge. But the truth was that he had never been passionately in love with Honnor Cunyngham. Passionate love he did not much believe in; he associated it with limelight, and crowded audiences,

and the odour of gas. Indeed it might almost be said that he had been in love not so much with Honnor Cunyngham as with the condition of life which she represented. He had grown restless and dissatisfied with his present state ; he had been imagining for himself another sort of existence—but always with her as the central figure of those fancied realms ; he had been dreaming dreams—of which she had invariably formed part. And now he had been awakened (somewhat abruptly, perhaps, but that may have been his own fault) ; and there was nothing for it but to summon his common sense to his aid, and to assure himself that Honnor Cunyngham, at least, was not to blame.

And yet sometimes, in spite of himself, as he smoked a final cigarette at midnight in those rooms in Piccadilly, a trace of bitterness would come into his reveries.

“I have been taught my place, that’s all,” he would say to himself. “Maurice was right—I had forgotten my Catechism. I wanted to play the gardener’s son, or Mordaunt to Lady Mabel ; and I can’t write poetry, and I’m not in the House of Commons. I suppose my head was a little bewildered by the kindness and condescension of those excellent people. They are glad to welcome

you into their rooms—you are a sort of curiosity—you sing for them—they've very civil for an hour or two—but you must remember to leave before the footmen proceed to shut the hall-door. Well, what's to be done? Am I to rush away to the wars, and come back a Field Marshal? Am I to make myself so obnoxious in Parliament that the noble earl will give me his daughter in order to shut my mouth? Oh, no; they simplify matters nowadays; 'as you were' is the word of command; go back to the theatre; paint your face and put on your finery; play the fool along with the rest of the comic people; and we'll come and look at you from the stalls; and if you will marry, why, then, keep in your own sphere, and marry Kate Burgoyne!"

For now—when he was peevish, and discontented, and restless, or even sick at heart, he hardly knew why—there was no Nina to solace and soothe him with her gentle companionship, her wise counsel, her bright, and cheerful, and wayward good-humour. Apparently he had as many friends and acquaintances as before; and yet he was haunted by a curious sense of solitude. Of a morning he would go out for a stroll along the familiar thoroughfares—Bond-street, Conduit-

street, Regent-street, where he knew all the shops at which Nina used to linger for a moment, to glance at a picture or a bonnet—and these seemed altogether different now. He could not have imagined he should have missed Nina so much. Instead of dining in his rooms at five o'clock and thereafter walking down to Sloane-street to have a cup of tea with Nina and Miss Girond before they all three set out for the theatre, he spent most of his afternoons at the Garden Club, where there was a good deal of the game of poker being played by young gentlemen in the upstairs rooms. And sometimes he returned thither after the performance, seeking anew the distraction of card-playing and betting, until he became notorious as the fiercest plunger in the place. Nobody could 'bluff' Lionel Moore; he would 'call' his opponent if he himself had nothing better than a pair of twos; and many a solid handful of sovereigns he had to pay for that privilege of gazing.

Day after day went by, and still there was no word of Nina: at times he was visited by sudden sharp misgivings that terrified him. The heading of a paragraph in a newspaper would startle his eyes; and then he would breathe again when he found that the poor wretch who had grown weary

of the world was unknown to him. Every evening, when Miss Girond came into the theatre, she was met by the same anxious, wondering question; and her reply was invariably the same.

“Don’t you think it very strange?” he asked of Estelle. “Nina said she would write to you or send you a message—I suppose as soon as all her plans were made. I hope nothing has happened to her,” he added, as a kind of timid expression of his own darker self-questionings.

“Something—something terrible?” said Estelle. “Ah, no. We should hear. No; Nina will make sure we cannot reach her—that she is not to be seen by you or me—then perhaps I have a message. Oh, she is very proud; she will make sure; the pain in her heart, she will hide it and hide it—until some time goes, and she can hold up her head, with a brave face. Poor Nina!—she will suffer—for she will not speak, no, not to any one.”

“But look here, Miss Girond,” he exclaimed, “if she has gone back to her friends in Italy, that’s all right; but if she is in this country, without any occupation, her money will soon be exhausted—she can’t have had so very much. What will become of her then? Don’t you think I should put an advertisement in the papers—not

in my name, but in yours—your initials—begging her at least to let you know where she is ?”

Estelle shook her head.

“No, it is useless. Perhaps I understand Nina a little better than you—though you know her longer. She is gentle, and affectionate, and very grateful to her friends; but under that there is firmness—oh, yes. She has firmness of mind although she is so loving; when she has decided to go away and remain, you will not draw her back, no, not at all! She will remain where she wishes to be; perhaps she decides never to see any of us again—well, well, it is pitiable, but for us to interfere, that is useless.”

“Oh, I am not so sure of that,” he said. “As you say, I have known Nina longer than you have; if I could only learn where she is, I am not so sure that I could not persuade her to come back.”

“Very well—try!” said Estelle, throwing out both hands. “I say no—that she will not say where she is. And your London papers—how will they find her? Perhaps she is in a small English village—perhaps in Paris—perhaps in Naples—perhaps in Malta. For me, no. She said, ‘If you are my friend, you will not seek to

discover where I have gone.' I am her friend; I obey her wish. When she thinks it is right, she will send me a message. Until then, I wait."

But if Nina had gone away—depriving him of her pleasant companionship, her quick sympathy, her grave and almost matron-like remonstrances—there was another quite ready to take her place. Miss Burgoyne did not at all appear to regret the disappearance from the theatre of Antonia Rossi. She was kinder to this young man than ever; she showered her experienced blandishments upon him, even when she rallied him about his gloomy looks or listless demeanour. All the time he was not on the stage, and not engaged in dressing, he usually spent in her sitting-room; there were cigarettes and lemonade awaiting him; and when she herself could not appear, at all events she could call to him a sort of conversation from the inner sanctuary. And often she would come out and finish her make-up before the large mirror, the while she talked to him.

"They tell me you gamble," she said to him on one occasion, in her blunt way.

"Not much," he said.

"What good do you get out of it?" she asked again.

"Oh, well, it is a sort of distraction. It keeps people from thinking."

"And what have you to think about?" continued *Grace Mainwaring*, regarding herself in the glass. "What dreadful crimes have you to forget? You want to drown remorse, do you? I dare say you ought; but I don't believe it all the same. You men don't care what you do—and poor girls' hearts get broken. But gambling! Well, I imagine most men have one vice or another; but gambling has always seemed to me the stupidest thing one could take to. Drink kills you; but I suppose you get some fun out of it. What fun do you get out of gambling? Too serious—isn't it? And then the waste of money. The fact is, you want somebody to take care of you, Master Lionel; and a fine job she'll have of it, whoever undertakes it!"

"Why should it be a she," he asked, "assuming that I am incapable of managing my own affairs?"

"Because it is the way of the world," she answered, promptly. "And you of all people need somebody to look after you. Why should you have to take to gambling, at your time of life? You're not shamming ennui, are you, to imitate

your swell acquaintances? Ennui!—I could cure their ennui for them, if they'd only come to *me*!" she added, scornfully.

"A cure for ennui?" he said. "That would be valuable—what is it?"

"I'd tell them to light a wax match and put it up their nostril and hold it there till it went out," she answered, with some sharpness.

"It would make them jump, anyway, wouldn't it?" he said, listlessly.

"It would give them something to claim their very earnest attention for at least a fortnight," Miss Burgoyne observed, with decision; and then she had to ask him to open the door, for it was time for her to get up to the wings.

Christmas was now close at hand; and one evening when *Harry Thornhill*, attired in his laced coat and ruffles, silken stockings and buckled shoes, went as usual into Miss Burgoyne's room, he perceived that she had somewhere or other obtained a piece of mistletoe, which she had placed on the top of the piano. As soon as *Grace Mainwaring* knew he was there, she came forth from the dressing-room and went to the big mirror, kicking out her resplendent train of flounced white satin behind her, and proceeding to judge of the

general effect of her powder and patches and heavily-pencilled eyebrows.

"Where are you going for Christmas?" she asked.

"Into the country," he answered.

"That's no good," said the brilliant-eyed white little bride, still contemplating herself in the glass, and giving a finishing touch here and there. "The country's too horrid at this time of year. We are going to Brighton, some friends and I, a rather biggish party; and a whole heap of rooms have been taken at a hotel. That will be fun, I promise you. A dance in the evening. You'd better come: I can get you an invitation."

"Thanks, I couldn't very well. I am going to play the good boy, and pass one night under the parental roof. It isn't often I get the chance."

"I wish you would tell me where to hang up that piece of mistletoe," she said, presently.

"I know where I should like to hang it up," he made answer, with a sort of lazy impertinence.

"Where?"

"Just over your head."

"Why?"

"You would see."

She made a little grimace.

"Oh, no, I shouldn't see anything of the kind," she retorted confidently. "I should see nothing of the kind. You haven't acquired the right, young gentleman. On the stage *Harry Thornhill* may claim his privileges—or make believe; but off the stage he must keep his distance."

That significant phrase about his not having acquired the right was almost a challenge. And why should he not say 'Well, give me the right!' What did it matter? It was of little concern what happened to him. As he lay back in his chair and looked at her, he guessed what she would do. He imagined the pretty little performance. 'Well, give me the right, then!' Miss Burgoyne turns round from the mirror. 'Lionel—what do you mean!' 'You know what I mean: let us be engaged lovers off the stage as well as on.' She hangs down her head. He goes to her and kisses her—without any mistletoe; she murmurs some doubt and hesitation, in her maiden shyness; he laughingly reassures her; it is all over, in half-a-dozen seconds. And then? Why, then he has secured for himself a sufficiently good-natured life-companion; it will be convenient in many ways, especially when they are engaged at the same theatre; he will marry in his own sphere—and

everybody be satisfied. If he has to give up his bachelor ways and habits, she will probably look after a little establishment as well as another; where there is no frantic passion on either side, there will be no frantic jealousy; and, after all, what is better than peace and quiet and content?

Was he too indolent, then, to accept this future that seemed to be offered to him?

"Looks rather odd to go to a Brighton hotel for Christmas," he said at random.

"It's the swagger thing to do, don't you know?" said Miss Burgoyne (whose phraseology sometimes made him wince). "It's the latest fad, among people who have no formal family ties. I can imagine it will be the jolliest thing possible. Instead of the big family gathering, where half the relations hate the sight of the other half, you have all nice people, picked friends and acquaintances; and you go away down to a place where you can have your choice of rooms, where you have plenty of freedom and no responsibility, where you can have everything you want and no trouble in getting it. Instead of foggy London, the sea; and at night, instead of Sir Roger de Coverley with a lot of hobbledehoys, you have a charming little dance, on a good floor, with capital partners.

Come, Master Lionel, change your mind ; and you and I will go down together on Christmas morning in the Pullman. Most of the others are there already ; it's only one or two poor professionals who will have to go down on Christmas-day."

But Lionel shook his head.

"Duty—duty," he murmured.

"Duty !" said she, contemptuously. "Duty is a thing you owe to other people—which no one ever thinks of paying to you." And therewith this profound moralist and epigrammatist tucked up her white satin train, and waited for him to open the door, so that she might make her way to the stage, he humbly following.

On the Christmas morning the display of parcels, packets, and envelopes, large and small, spread out on the side-table in his sitting-room was simply portentous ; for the fashionable world of London had had no intimation yet that their favourite singer was ill-disposed towards them, and had even at times formed sullen resolutions of withdrawing altogether from their brilliant rooms. As he quite indifferently turned the packages and letters over, trying to guess at the name of the sender by the address, he said to himself——

"They toss you those things out of their bounty

as they fling a shilling to a crossing-sweeper because it is Christmas-day."

But here was one that he opened, recognising the handwriting of his cousin Francie; and Francie had sent him a very pretty pair of blue velvet slippers, with his initials worked by herself in thread of gold. That was all right; for he had got for Miss Francie a little present that he was about to take down with him—a hand-bag in green lizard-skin that might be useful to her when she was going on her numerous errands. It was different with the next packet he opened (also recognising the writing) for this was a paper-weight—an oblong slab of crystal set in silver, with a photograph of the sender showing through, and the inscription at the foot "To Lionel Moore, from his sincere friend, K. B." And he had never thought of getting anything for Miss Burgoyne! Well, it was too late now; he would have to atone for his neglect of her when he returned to town; meanwhile he recollected that just about now she would be getting down to Victoria-station en route to Brighton; and indeed, had it not been for the duty he owed the old people, he would have been well content to be going with her. The last time he had been

in a Pullman car on the way to Brighton, it was with other friends—or acquaintances; he knew his place now; and was resigned. So he continued opening these parcels and envelopes carelessly and somewhat ungratefully, merely glancing at the various messages, until it was time to bethink him of setting forth.

But first of all, when the cab had been summoned and his portmanteau put on the top, he told the man to drive to a certain number in Sloane-street: he thought he would call for a minute on Mrs. Grey and Miss Girond, and wish them a pleasant Christmas. Estelle, when she made her appearance, knew better what had brought him hither.

“Ah, it is so kind of you to send me the pretty work-case—thank you, thank you very much; and Mrs. Grey is so proud of the beautiful lamp—she will tell you in a moment when she comes in. And if there is something we might have liked better?—pardon, it is no disfavour to the pretty presents, not at all—it is what you would like too, I am sure—it is a message from Nina. Yes, I expected it a little—I was awake hour after hour this morning—when the postman came I ran down the stairs—no! no word of any kind.”

He stood silent for a minute.

"I confess I had some kind of fancy she might wish to send you just a line or a card—any sort of reminder of her existence—on Christmas-day; for she knows the English custom," he said, rather absently. "And there is nothing—nothing of any kind, you say. Well, I have written to Pandiani."

"Ah, the maestro?—yes?"

"You see, I knew it was no use writing to her friends," he continued, "for if she were with them, she would tell them not to answer. But it is different with Pandiani. If she has got any musical engagement in Naples, or if she has gone to Malta, he would know. It seems hard that at Christmas-time we should be unable to send a message to Nina."

"Perhaps she is sure that we think of her," Estelle said, rather sadly. "I did not know till she was gone that I loved her so much and would miss her so much; because sometimes—sometimes she reproved me—and we had little disagreements—but all the same she was so kind—and always it was for your opinion I was corrected—it was what you would think if I did this or that. Ah, well, Nina will take her own time before she allows us to know. Perhaps she is not very happy."

Nor had Mrs. Grey any more helpful counsel or conjecture to offer; so rather downheartedly he got into the hansom again and set out for Victoria-station, where he was to meet Maurice Mangan.

Maurice he found in charge of a bewildering number of variously-sized packages, which seemed to cause him some anxiety, for there was no sort of proper cohesion amongst them.

"Toys for Francie's children, I'll bet," said Lionel.

"Well, how otherwise could I show my gratitude?" Mangan said. "You know it's awfully good of your people, Linn, to ask a poor solitary devil like me to join their Christmas family-party. It's almost too much——"

"I should think they were precious glad to get you!" Lionel made answer, as he and his friend took their seats in one of the carriages.

"And I've got a little present for Miss Francie herself," continued Mangan, opening his bag, and taking therefrom a small packet. He carefully undid the tissue-paper wrappers, until he could show his companion what they contained: it was a copy of 'Aurora Leigh,' bound in white vellum, and on the cover were stamped two tiny violets, green-stemmed and purple-blossomed.

“‘Aurora Leigh,’” said Lionel—not daring, however, to take the dainty volume in his hands. “That will just suit Miss Savonarola. And what are the two violets, Maurice—what do they mean?”

“Oh, that was merely a little device of my own,” Mangan said evasively.

“You don’t mean to say that these are your handiwork?” Lionel asked, looking a little closer.

“Oh, no. I merely drew them; and the binder had them stamped in colour for me.”

“And what did that cost?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“And don’t care—so long as it’s for Francie. And yet you are always lecturing me on my extravagance!”

“Oh, well, it’s Christmas-time,” Mangan said; “and I confess I like Christmas, and all its ways. I do. I seem to feel the general excitement throughout the country tingling in me too; I like to see the children eagerly delighted; and the houses decorated with evergreens; and the old folk pleased and happy with the enthusiasm of the youngsters. If I’ve got to drink an extra glass of port, I’m there; if it’s *Sir Roger de Coverley*, I’m there; I’ll do anything to add to the general

Schwärmerei. What the modern littérateur thinks it fine to write about Christmas being all sham sentiment is simply insufferable bosh. Christmas isn't in the least bit played out—though the magazinist may be, or may pretend to be. I think it's a grand thing to have a season for sending good wishes, for recollection of absent friends, for letting the young folk kick up their heels. I say, Linn, I hope there's going to be some sunlight down there. I am longing to see a holly-tree in the open-air—the green leaves and scarlet berries glittering in the sunlight. Oh, I can tell you an autumn session of Parliament is a sickening thing—when the interminable speeches and wranglings drag on and on until you think they're going to tumble over into Christmas-day itself. There's fog in your brain as well as in your throat; and you seem to forget there ever was an outer world; you get listless and resigned, and think you've lived all your life in darkness. Well, just a glimmer of sunshine, that's all I bargain for—just a faint glimmer, and a sight of the two holly-trees by the gate of the doctor's house."

What intoxication had got into the head of this man? Whither had fled his accustomed indiffer-

ence and indolence, his sardonic self-criticism? He was like a schoolboy off for holidays. He kept looking out of the window—with persistent hope of the grey sky clearing. He was impatient of the delay at the various stations. And when at length they got out, and found the doctor's trap awaiting them, and proceeded to get up the long and gradual incline that leads to Winstead village, he observed that the fat old pony, if he were lent for a fortnight to a butcher, would find it necessary to improve his pace.

When they reached the doctor's house, and entered, they found that only the old lady was at home: the doctor had gone to visit a patient; Miss Francie was as usual away among her young convalescents.

"It has been a busy time for Francie," Mrs. Moore said. "She has been making so many different things for them. And I don't like to hear her sewing machine going so late at night."

"Then why do you let her do it?" Lionel said, in his impetuous way. "Why don't you get in somebody to help her? Look here, I'll pay for that. You call in a seamstress to do all that sewing, and I'll give her a sovereign a week. Why should Francie have her eyes ruined?"

"Lionel is like the British Government, Mrs. Moore," Mangan said, with a smile. "He thinks he can get over every difficulty by pulling out his purse. But perhaps Miss Francie might prefer carrying out her charitable work herself."

So Maurice Mangan was arrogating to himself, was he, the right of guessing at Francie's preferences?

"Well, mother, tell me where I am likely to find her. I am going to pull her out of those fever-dens and refuges for cripples. Why, she ought to know that's all exploded now. Slumming, as a fad, had its day, but it's quite gone out now——"

"Do you think it is because it is fashionable, or was fashionable, that Miss Francie takes an interest in those poor children?" Maurice asked, gently.

Lionel was nearly telling him to mind his own business: why should he step in to defend cousin Francie?

"She said she was going across the common to old Widow Jackson's," his mother answered him, "and you may find her either there or on the way to the village."

"Widow Jackson's?" he repeated in doubt.

"Oh, I know it," Mangan said cheerfully. And again Lionel was somewhat astonished. How had Maurice Mangan acquired this particular knowledge of Francie's surroundings? Perhaps his attendance at the House of Commons had not been so unintermittent as he had intimated?

There were still further surprises in store for Master Lionel. When at length they encountered Miss Francie—how pretty she looked as she came along the pathway through the gorse, in her simple costume of dark grey, with a brown velvet hat and brown tan gloves!—it was in vain that he tried to dissuade her from giving up the rest of the afternoon to her small protégés. In the most natural way in the world she turned to Maurice Mangan—and her eyes sought his in a curiously straightforward, confiding fashion that caused Lionel to wonder.

"On Christmas-day, of all the days of the year!" she said, as if appealing to Maurice. "Surely, surely, I must give up Christmas-day to them! Oh, do you know, Mr. Mangan, there never was a happier present than you thought of for the little blind boy who got his leg broken—you remember? He learned almost directly how to do the puzzle; and he gets the ring off so quickly that no one can

see how it is done; and he laughs with delight when he finds that any neighbour coming in can only growl and grumble—and fail. I'm going there just now: won't you come? And mind you be very angry when you can't get the ring off; you may use any language you like about your clumsiness—poor little chap, he has heard plenty of that in his time."

Maurice needed no second invitation; this was what he had come for; he had found the sunlight to lighten up the Christmas-day withal; his face, that was almost beautiful in its fine intellectuality, showed that whenever she spoke to him. Lionel, of course, went with them.

And again it was Maurice Mangan whom Miss Francie addressed, as they walked along to the village.

"Do you know, in all this blessed place, I can't find a copy of Mrs. Hemans's poems; and I wanted you to read 'The Arab to his Horse'—is that the title?—at my school-treat to-morrow. They would all understand that. Well, we must get something else; for we're to make a show of being educational and instructive before the romping begins. I think the 'Highland Schottische' is the best of any for children who haven't learnt dancing: they can

all jump about somehow—and the music is inspiring. The Vicar's daughters are coming to hammer at the piano. Oh, Mr. Mangan," she continued, still appealing to him, "do you think you could tell them a thrilling folk-story?—wouldn't that be better?—"

"Don't you want me to do something, Francie?" said Lionel (perhaps a little hurt).

"Do you mean——"

"The only thing I'm fit for—I'll sing them a song, if you like. 'My Pretty Jane'—no, that would hardly do—'The Death of Nelson' or 'Rule Britannia'——"

"Wouldn't there be rather a risk, Lionel? If you were to miss your train—and disappoint a great audience in London?" she said, gently.

"Oh, I'll take my chance of that; I'm used to it," he said. "I'll have Dick and the pony waiting outside. Oh, yes, I'll sing something for them."

"It will be very kind of you," she said.

And again, as they went to this or that cottage, to see that the small convalescent folk were afforded every possible means of holding high holiday (how fortunate they were as compared with thousands of similar waifs and strays, shivering away the hopeless hours in dingy courts and

alleys, gin clutching at every penny that might have got food for their empty stomachs or rags for their poor shrunken limbs!) it was to Maurice Mangan that Francie chiefly talked, and, indeed, he seemed to know all about those patient little sufferers, and the time they had been down here, and when they might have to be sent back to London to make way for their successors. There was also a question as to which of their toys they might be permitted to carry off with them.

"Oh, I wouldn't deprive them of one," Mangan said, distinctly. "I've brought down a heap more this morning."

"Again—again?" she said, almost reproachfully; but the gentle grey eyes looked pleased notwithstanding.

Well, that Christmas evening was spent in the doctor's house with much quiet enjoyment; for the old people were proud to have their only son with them for so long a time; and Francie seemed glad to have the various labours of the day over; and Maurice Mangan, with quite unwonted zest, kept the talk flowing free. Next morning was chiefly devoted to preparations for the big entertainment to be given in the school-room; and in due course Lionel redeemed his promise by singing no fewer

than four songs—at the shyly-proffered request of the Vicar's pretty daughters : thereafter, leaving Maurice to conduct the gay proceedings to a close, he got out and jumped into the trap and was driven off to the station. He arrived at the New Theatre in plenty of time : the odour of consumed gas was almost a shock to him, well as he was used to it, after the clear air of Winstead.

And did he grudge or envy the obvious interest and confidence that appeared to have sprung up between his cousin and his friend ? Not one bit. Maurice had always had a higher appreciation of Francie and her aims and ideals than he himself had, much as he liked her ; and it was but natural she should turn to the quarter from which she could derive most sympathy and practical help. And if Maurice's long-proclaimed admiration for Miss Savonarola should lead to a closer bond between those two—what then ?

It was not jealousy that had hold of Lionel Moore's heart just at this time : it was rather a curious unrest that seemed to increase as day by day went by without bringing any word of Nina. Had she vouchsafed the smallest message, to say she was safe and well, to give him some notion of her whereabouts, it might have been different ; but

he knew not which way to turn, north, south, east, or west; at this season of kindly remembrance he could summon up no sort of picture of Nina and her surroundings. If only he had known, he kept repeating to himself! He had been so wrapt up in his idle dreams and visions that all unwittingly he had spurned and crushed this true heart beating close to his side. And as for making amends, what amends could now be made? He only wanted to know that Nina was alive—and could forgive.

As he sate by himself in the still watches of the night, plunged in silent reverie, strange fancies began to fill his brain. He recalled stories in which he had read of persons separated by great distances communicating with each other by some species of spiritual telegraphy; and a conviction took possession of him that now, if ever—now as the old year was about to go out and the new year come in—he could call to Nina across the unknown void that lay between them, and that she would hear and perchance respond. Surely, on New Year's eve, Nina would be thinking of her friends in London; and if their earnest and anxious thoughts could but meet her half way, might there not be some sudden understanding, some recog-

dition, some glad assurance that all was well? This wild fancy so grew upon him that when the last day of the year arrived it had become a fixed belief; and yet it was with a haunting sense of dread—a dread of he knew not what—that he looked forward to the stroke of twelve.

He got through his performance that night as if he were in a dream, and hurried home; it was not far from midnight when he arrived. He only glanced at the outside of the letters awaiting him; there was no one from her; not in that way was Nina to communicate with him, if her hopes for the future, her forgiveness for what lay in the past, were to reach him at all! He drew in a chair to the table, and sate down, leaving the letters unheeded.

The slow minutes passed; his thoughts went wandering over the world, seeking for what they could not find. And how was he to call to Nina, across the black gulf of the night, wheresoever she might be? Suddenly there leapt into his recollection an old German ballad he used to sing. It was that of the three comrades who were wont to drink together, until one died, and another died, and nevertheless the solitary survivor kept the accustomed tryst, and still, sitting there alone, he had the

three glasses filled, and still he sang aloud—‘*aus voller Brust.*’ There came an evening; as he filled the cups, a tear fell into his own; yet bravely he called to his ghostly companions: ‘I drink to you, my Brothers—but why are you so mute and still?’ And behold! the glasses clinked together; and the wine was slowly drank out of all the three. ‘*Fiducit! du wackerer Zecher!*’—it was the loyal comrade’s last draught. And now Lionel, hardly knowing what he was doing—for there were such wild desires and longings in his brain—went to a small cabinet hard by and brought forth the loving-cup he had given to Nina. They two were the last who had drank out of it. And if now, if once again, on this last night of all the nights of the year, he were to repeat his challenge, would she not know? He cared not in what form she might appear—Nina could not be other than gentle—silent she might be, but surely her eyes would shine with kindness and forgiveness! He was not aware of it, but his fingers were trembling as he took the cup in twain, and put the two tiny goblets on the table, and filled them with wine. Nay, in a sort of half-dazed fashion he went and opened the door and left it wide—might there not be some shadowy footfall on the empty stair? He returned

to the table and sate down ; it was almost twelve ; he was shivering a little—the night was cold.

All around him the silence appeared to grow more profound ; there was only the ticking of a clock. As minute after minute passed, the suspense became almost unendurable ; something seemed to be choking him ; and yet his eyes would furtively and nervously wander from the small goblets before him to the open door, as if he expected some vision to present itself there, from whatsoever distant shore it might come.

The clock behind him struck a silver note ; and instantly this vain fantasy vanished : what was the use of regarding the two wine-filled cups when he knew that Nina was far and far away ? He sprang to his feet, and went to the window, and gazed out into the black and formless chaos beyond.

“Nina !” he called, “Nina !—Nina !”—as if he would pierce the hollow distance with this passionate cry.

Alas ! how could Nina answer ? At this moment, over all the length and breadth of England, innumerable belfries had suddenly awakened from their sleep, and ten thousand bells were clanging their iron tongues, welcoming in the new-found

year. Down in the valleys, where white mists lay along the slumbering rivers; far up on lonely moorlands, under the clear stars; out on the sea-coasts, where the small red points of the windows were face-to-face with the slow-moaning, inarticulate main: everywhere, over all the land, arose this clamour of joy-bells; and how could Nina respond to his appeal? If she had heard, if she had tried to answer, her piteous cry was swallowed up and lost: heart could not speak to heart, whatever message they might wish to send, through this universal, far-pulsating jangle and tumult.

But perhaps she had not heard at all? Perhaps there was something more impassable between her and him than even the wide dark seas and the night?

He turned away from the window. He went back to the chair; he threw his arms on the table before him—and hid his face.

CHAPTER II.

ENTRAPPED.

THERE were two young gentlemen standing with their backs to the fire in the supper-room of the Garden Club. They were rather good-looking young gentlemen, very carefully shaven and shorn, grey-eyed, fair-moustached; and indeed they were so extremely like each other that it might have been hard to distinguish between them but that the one chewed a toothpick and the other a cigarette. Both were in evening dress, and both still wore the over-coat and crush-hat in which they had come into the club. They could talk freely, without risk of being overheard; for the members along there at the supper-table were all listening—with much laughter—to a professional entertainer, who, unlike the proverbial clown released from the pantomime, was never so merry and amusing as when diverting a select little circle of friends with his own marvellous adventures.

"It's about time for Lionel Moore to make his appearance," said one of the two companions, glancing at the clock.

"I would rather have anybody else, if it comes to that," said the other, peevishly. "Moore spoils the game all to bits. You never know where to have him——"

"Yes, that's just where he finds his salvation," continued he of the toothpick. "Mind you, that wild play has its advantages. He gets caught now and again; but he catches you at times. You make sure he is bluffing, you raise him and raise him, then you call him—and find he has three aces! And I will say this for Moore—he's a capital loser. He doesn't seem to mind losing a bit, so long as you keep on. You would think he was a millionaire; only a millionaire would have an eye on every chip, I suppose. What salary do they give him at the New Theatre?"

"Fifty pounds a week, I've heard say; but people tell such lies. Even fifty pounds a week won't hold out if he goes on like that. What I maintain is that it isn't good poker. For one thing, I object to 'straddling' altogether; it's simply a stupid way of raising the stakes; of course, the straddler has the advantage of coming

in last, but then look at the disadvantage of having to bet first. No, I don't object to betting before the draw; that's sensible; there's some skill and judgment in that; but straddling is simply stupid. You ought to make it easy for every one to come in; that's the proper game; frighten them out afterwards if you can." And then he added, gloomily, "That fellow Moore is a regular bull in a china-shop."

"I suspect he has been raking over a few of your chips, Bertie," his companion said, with a placid grin.

Just as he was speaking, Lionel entered the room, and, having ordered some supper, took a seat at the table. One of those young gentlemen, throwing away his toothpick, came and sate down opposite him.

"Big house to-night, as usual?" he asked.

"Full," was the answer. "I dare say when the archangel blows his trump, the *Squire's Daughter* will still be advertised in the bills all over the town. I don't see why it should stop before then."

"It would be a sudden change for the company, wouldn't it?" the young man on the other side of the table said. "Fancy, now, a music-hall singer

—no disrespect to you, Moore—I mean a music-hall comic—fancy his finding himself all at once in heaven; don't you think he'd feel deuced awkward? He wouldn't be quite at home, would he?—want to get back to Mr. Chairman and the chorus in the gallery, eh, what?—'pon my soul, it would make a capital picture if you could get a fellow with plenty of imagination to do it—quite tragic, don't you know,—you'd have the poor devil's face just full of misery—not knowing where to go or what to do—”

“The British public would be inclined to rise and rend that painter,” said Lionel, carelessly; this young man was useful as a poker-player, but otherwise not interesting.

Two or three members now came in; and by the time Lionel had finished his frugal supper, there was a chosen band of five ready to go upstairs and set to work with the cards. There was some ordering of lemon-squashes and further cigarettes; new packs were brought by the waiter; the players took their places; and the game was opened. With a sixpenny ‘ante’ and a ten-shilling ‘limit,’ the amusement could have been kept mild enough by any one who preferred it should remain so.

But the usual thing happened. Now and again a fierce fight would ensue between two good hands, and that seemed to arouse a spirit of general emulation and eagerness; the play grew more bold; bets apart from the game were laid by individual players between themselves. The putting up of the 'ante' became a mere farce, for every one came in as a matter of course, even if he had to draw five cards; and already the piles of chips on the table had undergone serious diminution or augmentation—in the latter case there was a glimmer of gold among the bits of ivory. There was no visible excitement, however; perhaps a player caught bluffing might smile a little—that was all.

Lionel had been pretty fortunate, considering his wild style of play; but then his very recklessness stood him in good stead when he chanced to have a fair hand—his reputation for bluffing leading on his opponents. And then an extraordinary bit of luck had befallen him. On this occasion the first hand dealt him contained three queens, a seven, and a five. To make the other players imagine he had either two pairs or was drawing to a flush, he threw away only one of the two useless cards—the five, as it chanced; but

his satisfaction (which he bravely endeavoured to conceal) may be imagined when he found that the single card dealt him in its place was a seven—he therefore had a full hand! When it came to his turn, instead of beginning cautiously as an ordinary player would have done, he boldly raised the bet ten shillings. But that frightened nobody. His game was known; they imagined he had either two pairs or had failed to fill his flush and was merely bluffing. When, however, there was another raise of ten shillings from the opposite side of the table, that was a very different matter: one by one the others dropped out, leaving these two in. And then it went on:

“Well, I’ll just see your ten shillings, and raise you another ten.”

“And another ten.”

“And another ten.”

“And another ten.”

Of course universal attention was now concentrated on this duel. Probably four out of five of the players were of opinion that Lionel Moore was bluffing: that at least was certainly the opinion of his antagonist, who kept raising and raising without a qualm. At length both of them had to borrow money to go on with; but still the

duel continued, and still the pile of gold and chips in the middle of the table grew and increased.

“And another ten.”

“And another ten.”

Not a word of encouragement or dissuasion was uttered by any one of the onlookers; they sate silent and amused, wondering which of the two was about to be smitten under the fifth rib. And at last it was Lionel's opponent who gave in.

“On this occasion,” said he, depositing his half-sovereign, “I will simply gaze; what have you got?”

“Well, I have got a full hand,” Lionel answered, putting down the cards on the table.

“That is good enough,” the other said stolidly. “Take away the money.”

After this dire combat, the game fell flat a little; but interest was soon revived by a round of Jack-pots; and here again Lionel was in good luck. Indeed, when the players rose from the table about three o'clock, he might have come away a winner of close on £40 had not some reckless person called out something about whisky-poker. Now whisky-poker is the very stupidest form of gambling that the mind of man has ever conceived, though at the end of the evening some folk hunger

after it as a kind of final fillip. Each person puts down a certain sum—it may be a sovereign, it may be five sovereigns; poker hands are dealt out, the cards being displayed face upwards on the table; there is no drawing; whoever has the best hand simply annexes the pool. It looks like a game, but it is not a game; it is merely cutting the cards; but as the stakes can be doubled or trebled each round, the jaded appetite for gambling finds here a potent and fiery stimulant just as the party breaks up. Lionel was not anxious to get away with the money he had won. It was he who proposed to increase the stakes to £10 from each player—which the rest of them, to their credit be it said, refused to do. In the end, when they went to get their hats and coats before issuing into the morning air, some one happened to ask Lionel how he had come off on the whole night; and he replied that he did not think he had either won or lost anything to speak of. He hardly knew. Certainly he did not seem to care.

The dawn was not yet. The gas-lamps shone in the murky thoroughfares as he set out for Piccadilly—alone. The others all went away in hansoms; he preferred to walk. And even when

he reached his rooms, he did not go to bed at once; he sate up thinking, a prey to a strange sort of restlessness that had of late taken possession of him. For this young man's gay and happy butterfly-life was entirely gone. The tragic disappearance of Nina, followed by the sudden shattering of all his visionary hopes in connection with Honnor Cunyngham had left him in a troubled, anxious, morbid state that he himself, perhaps, could not well have accounted for. Then the sense of solitariness that he had experienced when he found that Nina had so unexpectedly vanished from his ken had been intensified since he had taken to declining invitations from his fashionable friends, and spending his nights in the aimless distraction of gambling at the Garden Club. Was there a touch of hurt pride in his withdrawal from the society of those who in former days used to be called 'the great?' At least he discovered this, that if he did wish to withdraw from their society, nothing in the world was easier. They did not importune him. He was free to go his own way. Perhaps this also wounded him; perhaps it was to revenge himself that he sought to increase his popularity with the crowd; at night he sang with a sort of bravado to bring

down the house ; in the day-time it comforted him to perceive from a distance in that or the other window a goodly display of his photographs, which he had learned to recognise from afar. But in whatever direction these wayward moods drew him or tossed him, there was ever this all-pervading disquiet, and a haunting regret that almost savoured of remorse, and a sick impatience of the slow-passing and lonely hours.

He had given up all hopes of hearing from Nina now, or of gaining any news of her. Pandiani had nothing to tell him. The Signorina Antonia Rossi had not written to any of her Neapolitan friends, so far as could be ascertained, since the previous December : certainly she had not presented herself here in Naples, to seek any engagement. The old maestro, in praying his illustrious and celebrated correspondent to accept his respectful submissions, likewise begged of him, should anything be learnt with regard to the Signorina Rossi, to communicate further. There was no hope in that quarter.

But one morning Estelle made a new suggestion.

"There is something I have recalled ; yes ; it is perhaps of not great importance ; yet perhaps again," she said. "One day Nina and I we were

speaking, of this thing and the other, and she said it was right and proper that a young lady should have a *dot*—what is the English?—no matter. She said the young lady should bring something towards the—the management; and she asked how she or I could do that. Then comes her plan. She was thinking of it before she arrives in England. It was to go to America—to be engaged for concerts—oh, they pay large, large salaries, if you have a good voice—and Nina would take engagements for all the big cities, until she got over to San Francisco, and from there to Australia—a great tour—a long time—but at the end, then she has the little fortune, and she is independent, whatever happens. Marriage?—well, perhaps not; but she is independent. Yes, it was Nina's plan to go away on that long tour; but she comes to England—she is engaged at the New Theatre—she practises her little economies—but not so as it would be in America; and now, now if she wishes to go away for a long, long time, is it not America? She goes on the long voyage; she forgets—what she wishes to forget. Her singing, it is constant occupation; she must work; and they welcome a good voice there—she will have friends. Do you consider it not possible? Yes, it is possible—

for that is to go entirely away, and there is no danger of any one interfering."

"It's just frightful to think of," he said, "if what you imagine is correct. Fancy her crossing the Atlantic all by herself—landing in New York unknown to any human being there——"

"Ah, but do you fear for Nina?" Estelle cried. "No, no—she has courage—she has self-reliance, even in despair—she will have made preparations for all. Everywhere she has her passport—in her voice. 'I am Miss Ross, from the New Theatre, London,' she says. 'How do we know that you are Miss Ross?' 'Give me a sheet of music, then.' Perhaps it is in a theatre or a concert-room. Nina sings. 'Thank you, Mademoiselle, it is enough; what are the terms you wish for an engagement?' Then it is finished; and Nina has all her plans made for her, by the management; and she goes from one town to the other, far away perhaps, perhaps she has not much time to think of England. So much the better: poor Nina!"

And for a while he took an eager interest in the American newspapers. Such of them as he could get hold of he read diligently—particularly the columns in which concerts and musical entertain-

ments were announced or reported. But there was no mention of Miss Ross, or of any new singer whom he could identify with her. Gradually he lost all hope in that direction also. He did not forget Nina. He could not; but he grew to think that—whether she was in America, or in Australia, or in whatever far land she might be—she had gone away for ever. Her abrupt disappearance was no momentary withdrawal; she had sundered their familiar association, their close comradeship, that was never to be resumed; according to the old and sad refrain, it was ‘Adieu for evermore, my dear, and adieu for evermore!’ Well, for him there were still crowded houses with their dull thunder of applause; and there were cards and betting to send the one feverish hour flying after the other; and there were the lonely walks through the London streets in the daytime—when the hours did *not* fly so quickly. He had carefully put away those trinkets that Nina had returned to him; he would fain have forgotten their existence.

And then there was Miss Burgoyne. Miss Burgoyne could be very brisk and cheerful when she chose; and she now seemed bent on showing Mr. Lionel Moore the sunnier side of her character. In truth she was most assiduously kind to the

young man, even when she scolded him about the life he was leading. Her room and its mild refreshments were always at his disposal. She begged for his photograph, and, having got it, she told him to write something very nice and pretty at the foot of it : why should formalities be used between people so intimately and constantly associated ? On more than one occasion she substituted a real rose (which was not nearly so effective, however) for the milinery blossom which *Grace Mainwaring* had to drop from the balcony to her lover below ; and of course Lionel had to treasure the flower, and keep it in water, until the hot and gassy atmosphere of his dressing-room killed it. Once or twice she called him Lionel, by way of pretty inadvertence.

There came an afternoon when the fog that had lain all day over London deepened and deepened until in the evening the streets were become almost impassable. The various members of the company, setting out in good time, managed to reach the theatre—though there were breathless accounts of adventures and escapes as this one or that hurried through the wings and down into the dressing-room corridor ; but the public, not being paid to come forth on such a night, for the most part preferred the snugness and safety of their

own homes, so that the house was but half filled, and the faces of the scant audience were more dusky than ever—were almost invisible—beyond the blaze of the footlights. And as the performance proceeded, Miss Burgoyne professed to become more and more alarmed. Dreadful reports came in from without. All traffic was suspended. It was scarcely possible to cross a street. Even the policemen, familiar with the thoroughfares, dared hardly leave the pavement to escort a bewildered traveller to the other side.

When Lionel, having dressed for the last act, went into Miss Burgoyne's room, he found her (apparently) very much perturbed.

"Have you heard? It's worse than ever!" she called to him from the inner apartment.

"So they say."

"Whatever am I to do!" she exclaimed—her anxiety proving too much for her grammar.

"Well, I think you couldn't do better than stop where you are," *Harry Thornhill* made answer, carelessly.

"Stop where I am? It's impossible! My brother Jim would go frantic. He would make sure I was run over, or drowned, or something—and be off to the police-stations."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't—he wouldn't stir out on such a night, if he had any sense."

"Not if he thought his sister was lost? That's all you know. There are some people who do have a little affection in their nature," said Miss Burgoyne, as she drew aside the curtain, and came forth, and went to the tall glass. "But surely I can get a four-wheeled cab, Mr. Moore? I will give the man a sovereign to take me safe home. And even then it will be dreadful. I get so frightened in a bad fog—absolutely terrified—and especially at night. Supposing the man were to lose his way? Or he might be drunk? I wish I had asked Jim to come down for me. There's Miss Constance's mother never misses a single night: I wonder who she thinks is going to run away with that puny-faced creature!"

"Oh, if you are at all afraid to make the venture alone, I will go with you," said he. "I don't suppose I can see further in a fog than any one else; but if you are nervous about being alone, you'd better let me accompany you."

"Will you?" she said, suddenly wheeling round, and bestowing upon him a glance of obvious gratitude. "That is indeed kind of you! Now I don't care for all the fogs in Christendom. But

really and truly," she added, "really and truly you must tell me if I am taking you away from any other engagement."

"Not at all," he said, idly. "I had thought of going up to the Garden Club for some supper; but it isn't the sort of night for anybody to be wandering about. When I've left you in the Edgware Road, I can find my way to my rooms easily. Once in Park Lane, I could go blindfold."

And very proud and pleased was Miss Burgoyne to accept his escort—that is to say, when he had, with an immense amount of trouble, brought a four-wheeled cab, accompanied by two link-boys with blazing torches, up to the stage-door. And when they had started off on their unknown journey through this thick chaos, she did not minimise the fears she otherwise should have suffered: this was thanking him by implication. As for the route chosen by the cabman, or rather by the link-boys, neither he nor she had the faintest idea what it was. Outside they could see nothing but the gold-and-crimson of the torches flaring through the densely yellow fog; while the grating of the wheels against the kerb told them that their driver was keeping as close as he could to the pavement. Then they would find themselves

leaving that guidance, and blindly adventuring out into the open thoroughfare to avoid some obstacle—some spectral wain or omnibus got hopelessly stranded; while there were muffled cries and calls here, there, and everywhere. They went at a snail's pace, of course. Once, at a corner, the near wheels got on the pavement; the cab tilted over; Miss Burgoyne shrieked aloud, and clung to her companion; then there was a heavy bump, and the venerable vehicle resumed its slow progress. Suddenly they beheld a cluster of dim, nebulous, phantom lights high up in air.

"This must be Oxford-circus, surely," Lionel said.

He put his head out of the window, and called to the cabman.

"Where are we now, cabby?"

"Blessed if I know, sir!" was the husky answer, coming from under the heavy folds of a cravat.

"Boy," he called again, "where are we? Is this Oxford-circus?"

"No, no, sir," responded the sharp voice of the London *gamin*. "We ain't 'alf-way up Regent-street yet!"

He shut the window.

"At this rate, goodness only knows when you'll ever get home," he said to her. "You should have stopped at the theatre."

"Oh, I don't mind," said she, cheerfully. "It's an adventure. It's something to be talked of afterwards. I shouldn't wonder if the theatrical papers got hold of it—just the kind of paragraph to go the round—*Harry Thornhill* and *Grace Mainwaring* lost in a fog together. No, I don't mind. I'm very well off. But fancy some of those poor girls about the theatre, who must be trying to get home on foot. No four-wheeled cabs for them: no companion to keep up their spirits. I shan't forget your kindness, Mr. Moore."

Indeed Lionel was much more anxious than she was. He would rather have done without that paragraph in the newspapers. All his senses were on the rack; and yet he could make out absolutely nothing of his whereabouts in this formless void of a world, with its opaque atmosphere, its distant calls, enquiries, warnings, its murky lamp-lights that only became visible when they were over one's head. Miss Burgoyne seemed to be well-content, to be amused even. She liked to see her name in the newspapers. There would be a pretty little paragraph to get quoted in gossippy columns, even

if she and her more anxious fellow-adventurer did not reach home till breakfast time.

The link-boys certainly deserved the very substantial reward that Lionel bestowed on them; for when, after what seemed interminable hours—with all kinds of stoppages and enquiries in this Egyptian darkness—the cab came to a final halt, and when Miss Burgoyne had been piloted across the pavement, she declared that here, indubitably, was her own door. Indeed, at this very moment it was opened, and there was a glimmer of a candle in the passage.

“No, Mr. Moore,” she said distinctly, when Lionel came back after paying the cabman, “you are not going off like that, certainly not. You must be starving; you must come upstairs and have something to eat and drink. Jim,” she said, addressing her brother, who was standing there, candle in hand, “have you left any supper for us?”

“I haven’t touched a thing yet!” said he. “I’ve been waiting for you I don’t know how long.”

“There’s a truly heroic brother!” exclaimed the young lady, as she pulled Lionel into the little lobby, and shut the door. “What’s enough

for two is enough for three. Come along, Mr. Moore; and now you've got safely into a house, I think you'd much better have Jim's room for the night—or the morning, rather: I'm sure Jim won't mind taking the sofa."

"I? Not I!" said her brother, blowing out the candle as they entered the lamp-lit room.

It was a pretty room, and with its blazing fire looked very warm and snug after the cold, raw night without. Miss Burgoyne threw off her cloak and hat, and set to work to supplement the supper that was already laid on the central table. Her brother Jim—who was a dawdling, good-natured-looking lad of about fifteen, clad in a marvellous costume of cricketing trousers, a 'blazer' of overpowering blue and yellow stripes, and an Egyptian fez set far back on his forehead—helped her to explore the contents of the cupboard; and very soon the three of them were seated at a comfortable, and most welcome, little banquet. Indeed the charming little feast was almost sumptuous: insomuch that Lionel was inclined to ask himself whether Miss Burgoyne, who was an astute young lady, had not foreseen the possibility of this small supper-party before leaving home in the afternoon. The oysters, for

example: did Miss Burgoyne order a dozen oysters for herself alone every evening?—for her brother declared that he had never touched, and would not touch, any such thing. Lionel observed that his own photograph, which he had recently given her, had been accorded the place of honour on the mantel-shelf: another portrait of him, which she had bought, stood on the piano. But why these trivial suspicions?—when she was so kind and hospitable and considerate! She pressed things on him; she herself filled up his glass; she was as merry as possible, and talkative, and good-humoured.

“Just to think we’ve known each other so long, and you’ve never been in my house before!” she said. “That’s a portrait of my younger sister you’re looking at—isn’t she pretty? It’s a pastel—Miss Corkran’s. Of course she is not allowed to sit up for me; only Jim does that; he keeps me company at supper-time; for I couldn’t sit down all by myself, could I, in the middle of the night? Oh, yes, you must have some more: I know gentlemen are afraid of champagne in a house looked after by a woman; but that’s all right; that was sent me as a Christmas present by Mr. Lehmann—”

"It is excellent," Lionel assured her, "but I must keep my head clear if I am to find my way into Park Lane: after that, it will be easy enough getting home."

"But there's Jim's room!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no, thank you," he said; "I shall get down there without any trouble."

And then she went to a cabinet that formed part of a bookcase and returned with a cigar-box in her hand.

"I am not so sure of these," she said. "They are some I got when papa was last in town; and he seemed to think them tolerable——"

"Oh, but I shan't smoke, thanks—no, no, I couldn't think of it!" he protested. "You'll soon be coming down again to breakfast——"

"To please me, Mr. Moore," she said, somewhat authoritatively. "I assure you there's nothing in the world I like so much as the smell of cigars."

What was she going to say next? But he took a cigar and lit it; and again she filled up his glass—which he had not emptied; and they set to talking about the Royal Academy of Music, while she nibbled Lychee nuts, and her brother Jim subsided into a French novel. Miss Burgoyne

was a sharp and shrewd observer; she had had a sufficiently varied career; and had come through some amusing experiences. She talked well; but on this evening, or morning, rather, always on the good-natured side: if she described the foibles of any one with whom she had come in contact, it was with a laugh. Lionel was inclined to forget that outer world of thick cold fog, so warm and pleasant was the bright and pretty room, so easily the time seemed to pass.

However, he had to tear himself away in the end. She insisted on his having a muffler of Jim's to wrap round his throat; both she and her brother went downstairs to see him out; and then, with a hasty good-bye, he plunged into the dark. He had some difficulty in crossing to the top of Park Lane, for there were waggons come in from the country waiting for the daylight to give them some chance of moving on; but eventually he found himself in the well-known thoroughfare, and thereafter had not much trouble in getting down to his rooms in Piccadilly. This time he went to bed without sitting up in front of the fire, in aimless reverie.

This was not the last he was to hear of that adventure. Two days afterward the foreshadowed

paragraph appeared in an evening paper; and from thence it was copied into all the weekly periodicals that deal more or less directly with theatrical affairs. It was headed "The Squire's Daughter in Wednesday night's fog;" and gave a minute and somewhat highly coloured account of Miss Burgoyne's experiences on the night in question; while the fact of her having been escorted by Mr. Lionel Moore was pointed to as another instance of the way in which professional people were always ready to help each other. That this account emanated in the first place from Miss Burgoyne herself, there could be no doubt whatever; for there were certain incidents—as, for example, the cab wheels getting up on the pavement, and the near upsetting of the vehicle—which were only known to herself and her companion; but Lionel did not in his own mind accuse her of having directly instigated its publication. He thought it was more likely one of the advertising tricks of Mr. Lehmann, who was always trying to keep the chief members of his company well before the public. It was the first time, certainly, that he, Lionel, had had his name coupled (unprofessionally) with that of Miss Burgoyne in the columns of a newspaper; but was that

of any consequence? People might think what they liked. He had grown a little reckless and careless of late.

But a much more important event was now about to happen which the theatrical papers would have been glad to get for their weekly gossip, had the persons chiefly concerned thought fit. Just at this time there was being formed in London, under distinguished patronage, a loan-collection of arms and embroideries of the Middle Ages; and there was to be a Private View on the Saturday preceding the opening of the exhibition to the public. Amongst others, Miss Burgoyne received a couple of cards of invitation; whereupon she came to Lionel, told him that her brother Jim was going to see some football match on that day, explained that she was very anxious to have a look at the precious needlework, and virtually asked him to take her to the show. Lionel hung back; the crowd at this Private View were sure to include a number of fashionable folk; there might be one or two people there whom he would rather not meet. But Miss Burgoyne was gently persuasive, not to say pertinacious; he could not well refuse; finally it was arranged he should call for her about half past one o'clock on the Saturday, so that they

might have a look round before the crush began in the afternoon.

Trust an actress to know how to dress for any possible occasion! When he called for her, he found her attired in a most charming costume; though, to be sure, when she was at last ready to go, he may have thought her furs a trifle too magnificent for her height. They drove in a hansom to Bond-street. There were few people in the rooms; certainly no one whom he knew; she could study those gorgeous treasures of embroidery from Italy and the East, he could examine the swords and daggers and coats of mail, as they pleased. And when they had lightly glanced round the rooms, he was for getting away again; but she was bent on remaining until the world should arrive, and declared that she had not half exhausted the interest of the various cases.

As it chanced, the first persons he saw whom he knew were Miss Georgie Lestrangle and her brother; and Miss Georgie, not perceiving that any one was with him (for Miss Burgoyne was at the moment feasting her eyes on some rich-hued Persian stuffs), came up to him.

"Why, Mr. Moore, you have quite disappeared of late," the ruddy-haired damsel said, reproach-

fully. "Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Don't you ever read the newspapers, Miss Lestrangle?" he said. "I have been advertised as being on view every night at the New Theatre."

"Oh, I don't mean that. Lady Adela says you have quite forsaken her."

"Is Lady Adela to be here this afternoon?" he asked, in an off-hand way.

"Oh, certainly," replied Miss Georgie. "She is going everywhere just now, in order to put everything into her new novel. It is to be a perfectly complete picture of London life as we see it around us."

"That is, the London between Bond-street and Campden-hill?"

"Oh, well, all London is too big for one canvas. You must cut it into sections. I dare say she will take up Whitechapel in her next book."

Miss Burgoyne turned from the glass case to seek her companion, and seemed a little surprised to find him talking to these two strangers. It was the swiftest glance; but Miss Georgie divined the situation in an instant.

"Good-bye for the present," she said, and she and her brother passed on.

And now he was more anxious than ever to get away. If Lady Adela and her sisters were coming to this exhibition, was it not highly probable that Honnor Cunyngham might be of the party? He did not wish to meet any one of them; especially did he not care to meet them while he was acting as escort to Miss Burgoyne. There were reasons, which he could hardly define; he only knew that the clicking of the turnstile on the stair was an alarming sound; and that he regarded each new group of visitors, as they came into the room, with a furtive apprehension.

"Oh, very well," Miss Burgoyne said, at length, "let us go." And on the staircase she again said: "What is it? Are you afraid of meeting the mamma of some girl you've jilted? Or some man to whom you owe money for cards? Ah, Master Lionel, when are you going to reform, and lead a steady and respectable life?"

He breathed more freely when he was outside: here, in the crowd, if he met any one to whom he did not wish to speak, he could be engaged with his companion and pass on without recognition. He proposed to Miss Burgoyne that they should walk home, by way of Piccadilly and Park Lane; and that young lady cheerfully assented. It was quite

a pleasant afternoon, for London in mid-winter. The setting sun shone with a dull copper lustre along the fronts of the tall buildings; and over the trees of the Green Park hung clouds that were glorified by the intervening red-hued mists. The air was crisp and cold—what a blessing it was to be able to breathe.

Lionel was silent and absorbed; he only said ‘Yes?’ ‘Really!’ ‘Indeed,’ in answer to the vivacious chatter of his companion, who was in the most animated spirits. His brows were drawn down; his look was more sombre than it ought to have been, considering who was with him. Perhaps he was thinking of the crowded rooms they had recently left; and of the friends who might now be arriving there, from whom he had voluntarily isolated himself. Had they, had any one of them, counselled him to keep within his own sphere? Well, he had taken that advice: here he was—walking with Miss Burgoyne!

All of a sudden that young lady stopped and turned to the window of a jeweller’s shop; and of course he followed. No wonder her eyes had been attracted: here were all kinds of beautiful things and splendours—tiaras, coronets, necklaces, pendants, bracelets, earrings, bangles, brooches, set

with all manner of precious stones, the clear-radiant diamond, the purple amethyst, the sea-green emerald, the mystic opal, the blue-black sapphire, the clouded pearl. Her raptured vision wandered from tray to tray, but it was a comparatively trifling article that finally claimed her attention—a tiny finger-ring set with small rubies and brilliants.

“Oh, do look at this!” she said to her companion. “Did you ever see such a love of a ring—what a perfect engagement-ring it would make!”

Then what mad, half-sullen, half-petulant, and wholly reckless impulse sprang into his brain!

“Well, will you wear that as an engagement-ring, if I give it to you?” he asked.

She looked up, startled, amused, but not displeased.

“Why, really—really—that is a question to ask!” she exclaimed.

“Come along in and see if it fits your finger—come along!” and therewith Miss Burgoyne, a little bewildered, and still inclined to laugh, found herself at the jeweller’s counter. Was it a joke? Oh, certainly not. Lionel was quite serious and matter-of-fact. The tray was produced. The ring

was taken out. For a moment she hesitated as to which finger to try it on, but overcame that shyness, and placed it on the third finger of her left hand, and said it fitted admirably.

“Just keep it where it is, then,” he said; and then he added a word or two to the jeweller, whom he knew; and he and his companion left the shop.

“Oh, Lionel, what an idea!” said Miss Burgoyne, with her eyes bent modestly on the pavement. “If I had fancied you knew that man, do you think I would ever have entered the place? What must he think! What would any one think—an engagement in the middle of the streets of London!”

“Plenty of witnesses to the ceremony, that’s all,” said he, lightly.

Nay, was there not a curious sense of possession, now that he walked alongside this little bright person in the magnificent furs? He had acquired something—by this simple transaction: he would be less lonely now; he would mate with his kind. But he did not choose to look far into the future. Here he was walking along Piccadilly, with a cheerful, and smiling, and prettily-costumed young lady by his side who had just been so kind as to

accept an engagement-ring from him; and what more could he want?

"Lionel," she said, still with modestly downcast eyes, "this mustn't be known to any human being—no, not to a single human being—not yet, I mean. I will get a strip of white india-rubber to cover the ring, so that no one shall be able to see it on the stage."

Perhaps he recalled the fact that recently she had been wearing another ring similarly concealed from the public gaze; or perhaps he had forgotten that little circumstance. What did it matter? Did anything matter? He only knew he had pledged himself to marry Kate Burgoyne—enough.

CHAPTER III.

IN DIRER STRAITS.

Now when a young man, in whatever wayward mood of petulance, or defiance, or wounded self-love, chooses to play tricks with his own fate, he is pretty sure to discover that sooner or later he has himself to reckon with—his other and saner self that will arise and refuse to be silenced. And this awakening came almost directly to Lionel Moore. Even as he went down to the theatre that same evening, he began to wonder whether Miss Burgoyne would really be wearing the ring he had given her. Or would she not rather consider the whole affair a joke?—not a very clever joke, indeed, but at least something to be put on one side and forgotten. She had been inclined to laugh at the idea of two people becoming engaged to each other in the middle of the London streets. A life-

pledge offered and accepted in the front of a window in Piccadilly!—why, such was the way of comic opera, not of the actual world. Jests of that kind were all very well in the theatre, but they were best confined to the stage. And would not Miss Burgoyne understand that on a momentary impulse he had yielded to a fit of half-sullen recklessness, and would she not be quite ready and willing to release him?

But when according to custom he went into her room that evening, he soon became aware that Miss Burgoyne did not at all treat this matter as a jest.

“See!” she said to him with a becoming shyness—and she showed him how cleverly she had covered her engagement-ring with a little band of flesh-tinted india-rubber. “No one will be able to see it; and I shan’t have to take it off at all. Why, I could play Galatea, and not a human being would notice that the statue was wearing a ring!”

She seemed very proud and pleased and happy, though she spoke in an undertone (for Jane was within earshot). As for him, he did not say anything. Of course he was bound to stand by what he had done, and suffer the consequences,

whatever they might be. When he left the room and went upstairs into the wings, it was in a vague sort of stupefaction; but here were the immediate exigencies of the stage; and perhaps it was better not to look too far ahead.

But it was with just a little sense of shame that he found, when the piece was over, and they were ready to leave the theatre, that Miss Burgoyne expected him to accompany her on her way home. If only he had had sufficient courage he might have said to her—

“Look here: we are engaged to be married; and I’m not going to back out; I will fulfil my promise whenever you please. But for goodness’ sake don’t expect me to play the lover—off the stage as well as on. Sweethearting is a silly sort of business; don’t we have enough every evening before the footlights? Let us conduct ourselves as rational human creatures—when we’re not paid to make fools of ourselves. What good will it do if I drive home with you in this hansom? Do you expect me to put my arm round your waist? No, thanks; there isn’t much novelty in that kind of thing, for *Grace Mainwaring* and *Harry Thornhill*.”

And when eventually they did arrive in Edgware

Road, she could not induce him to enter the house and have some bit of supper with herself and her brother Jim.

"What are you going to do to-morrow, then?" she asked. "Will you call for me in the morning and go to church with me?"

"I don't think I shall stir out to-morrow," he said, "I feel rather out of sorts; and I fancy I may try what a day in bed will do."

"How can you expect to be well if you sit up all night playing cards?" she demanded, with reason on her side. "However, there's to be no more of that now. So you won't come in—not for a quarter of an hour?"

She rang the bell.

"Oh, Lionel, by the way, do you think Jim should know?" she asked, with her eyes cast down in maiden modesty.

"Just as you like," he answered.

"Why, you don't seem to take any interest!" she exclaimed, with a pout. "I wonder what Percy Miles will say, when he hears of it. Oh, my goodness, I'm afraid to think!"

"What he will say won't matter very much," Lionel remarked, indifferently.

"Poor boy, I'm sorry for him," she said,

apparently with a little compunction, perhaps even regret.

The door was opened by her brother.

"Sure you won't come in?" she finally asked.

"Well, I shall be at home all to-morrow afternoon, if you happen to be up in this direction. Good-night!"

"Good-night," said he, taking her outstretched hand for a second; then he turned and walked away. There had not been much love-making—so far.

But he did not go straight to his lodgings. He wandered away aimlessly through the dark streets. He felt sick at heart—not especially because of this imbroglio into which he had walked with open eyes; for that did not seem to matter much, one way or the other. But everything appeared to have gone wrong with him, since Nina had left; and the worst of it was that he was gradually ceasing to care how they went, right or wrong. At this moment, for example, he ought to have been thinking of the situation he had created for himself, and resolving either to get out of it before more harm was done, or to loyally fulfil his contract by cultivating what affection for Miss Burgoyne was possible in the circumstances. But

he was not thinking of Miss Burgoyne at all. He was thinking of Nina. He was thinking how hard it was that whenever his fancy went in search of her—away to Malta, to Australia, to the United States, as it might be—he could not hope to find a Nina whom he could recognise. For she would be quite changed now. His imagination could not picture to himself a Nina grown grave and sad-eyed, perhaps furtively hiding her sorrow, fearing to encounter her friends. The Nina whom he had always known was a light-hearted and laughing companion, eagerly talkative, a smile on her parted lips, affection, kindness ever present in her shining soft dark eyes. Sometimes silent, too; sometimes, again, singing a fragment of one of the old familiar folk-songs of her youth. What was that one with the refrain *Io te voglio bene assaje, e tu non pienz' a me!*—

*La notte tutte dormeno,
E io che buò dormire!
Pensanno a Nenna mia
Mme sent' ascevoli.
Li quarte d'ora sonano
A uno, a doje e tre . . .
Io te voglio bene assaje,
E tu non pienz' a me!*

. . . Look, now, at this beautiful morning—the

wide bay all of silver and azure—Vesuvius sending its column of dusky smoke into the cloudless sky—the little steamer churning up the clear water as it starts away from the quay. Ah, we have escaped from you, good Maestro Pandiani; there shall be no grumblings and incessant repetitions to-day; no, nor odours of onions coming up the narrow and dirty stairs: here is the open world, all shining, and the sweet air blowing by, and Battista trying to sell his useless canes, and the minstrels playing ‘Santa Lucia’ most sentimentally, as though they had never played it before. Whither, then, Nina? To Castellamare or Sorrento, with their pink and yellow houses, their terraces and gardens, their vine-smothered bowers, or rather to the filmy island out yonder, that seems to move and tremble in the heat? A couple of words in their own tongue suffice to silence the importunate coral-girls; we climb the never-ending steps; behold, a cool and gracious balcony, with windows looking far out over the quivering plain of the sea. Then the soup, and the boiled corn, and the caccia-cavallo—you Neapolitan girl!—and nothing will serve you but that orris-scented stuff that you fondly believe to be honest wine. You will permit a cigarette? Then shall we descend to

the beach again, and get into a boat, and lie down, and find ourselves shot into the Blue Grotto—find ourselves floating between heaven and earth in a hollow-sounding globe of azure flame? . . . Dreams—dreams! *Io te voglio bene assaje, e tu non pienz' a me!*

During the first period of Miss Burgoyne's engagement to Lionel Moore, all went well. Jane, her dresser, had quite a wonderful time of it; her assiduous and arduous ministrations were received with the greatest good nature; now she was never told, if she hurt her mistress in lacing up a dress, that she deserved to have her face slapped. Miss Burgoyne was amiability itself towards the whole company, so far as she had any relations with them; and at her little receptions in the evening, she was all brightness and merriment, even when she had to join in the conversation from behind the heavy portière. Whether this small coterie in the theatre guessed at the true state of affairs, it is hard to say; but at least Miss Burgoyne did not trouble herself much about concealment. She called her affianced lover 'Lionel,' no matter who chanced to be present; and she would ask him to help her to hand the tea, just as if he already belonged to her. Moreover, she told him

that Mr. Percival Miles had some suspicion of what had happened.

"Not that I would admit anything definite," said the young lady. "There will be time enough for that. And I did not want a scene. But I'm sorry. It does seem a pity that so much devotion should meet with no requital."

"Devotion!" said Lionel.

"Oh, of course you don't know what devotion means. Your fashionable friends have taught you what good form is; you are blasé, indifferent; it's not women, it's cards, that interest you. You have no fresh feeling left," continued this ingénue of the green-room. "You have been so spoiled—"

"I see he's up at the Garden Club," said Lionel, to change the subject.

"Who?"

"The young gentleman you were just speaking of."

"Percy Miles? What does he want with an all-night club?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Ah, well, I suppose he is not likely to get in," she said, turning to the tall mirror. "Percy is very nice—just the very nicest boy I know—but

I'm afraid he is not particularly clever. He has written some verses in one or two magazines—of course you can't expect me to criticise them severely, considering who was the 'only begetter' of them—"

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it," Lionel interrupted again. "He is sure to get in. There's no qualification at the Garden, so long as you're all right socially. There are plenty such as he in the club already."

"But why does he want to get in?" she said, wheeling round. "Why should he want to sit up all night playing cards? Now tell me honestly, Lionel, it isn't your doing! You didn't ask him to join, did you? You can't be treasuring up any feeling of vengeance—"

"Oh, nonsense; I had nothing to do with it. I saw his name in the candidates' book quite by accident. And the election is by committee—he'll get in all right. What does he want with it?—oh, I don't know. Perhaps he has been disappointed in love, and seeks for a little consolation in card-playing."

"Yes, you always sneer at love—because you don't know anything about it," she said snappishly. "Or perhaps you are an extinct volcano. I suppose

you have sighed your heart out like a furnace—and for a foreigner, I'll be bound ! ”

Nay, it was hardly to be wondered at that Miss Burgoyne should be indignant with so lukewarm and reluctant a lover, who received her coy advances with coldness, and was only decently civil to her when they talked of wholly indifferent matters. The mischief of it was that in casting about for some key to the odd situation she took it into her head to become jealous of Nina; and many were the bitter things she managed to say about foreigners generally, and about Italians in particular, and Italian singers, and so forth. Of course Miss Ross was never openly mentioned; but Lionel understood well enough at whom these covert innuendoes were hurled; and sometimes his eyes burned with a fire far other than that which should be in a lover's eyes when contemplating his mistress. Indeed it was a dangerous amusement for Miss Burgoyne to indulge in. It was easy to wound; it might be less easy to efface the memory of these wounds. And then there was a kind of devilish ingenuity about her occult taunts. For example, she dared not say that doubtless Miss Nina Ross had gone away back to Naples, and had taken up with a sweetheart, with whom she was

now walking about; but she described the sort of young man calculated to capture the fancy of an Italian girl.

“The seedy swell of Naples or Rome—he is irresistible to the Italian girl,” she said on one occasion. “You know him: his shirt open at the neck down almost to his chest—his trousers tight at the knee and enormously wide at the foot—a poncho-looking kind of cloak, with a greasy Astrachan collar—a tall French hat, rather shabby—a face the colour of paste—an odour of cigarettes and garlic—dirty hands—and a cane. I suppose the theatre is too expensive, so he goes to the public gardens, and strolls up and down, and takes off his hat with a sweep to people he pretends to recognise; or perhaps he sits in front of a café, with a glass of cheap brandy before him, an evening journal in his hands, and a tooth-pick in his mouth.”

“You seem to have made his very particular acquaintance,” said he, with a touch of scorn. “Did he give you his arm when you were walking together in the public gardens?”

“Give *me* his arm?” she exclaimed. “I would not allow such a creature to come within twenty yards of me! I prefer people who use soap.”

"What a pity it is they can't invent soap for purifying the mind!" he said, venomously; and he went out, and spoke no more to her during the rest of that evening.

Matters went from bad to worse; for Miss Burgoyne, finding nothing else that could account for his habitual depression of spirits, his occasionable irritability, and obvious indifference towards herself, made bold to assume that he was secretly, even if unconsciously, fretting over Nina's absence; and her jealousy grew more and more angry and vindictive until it carried her beyond all bounds. For now she began to say disparaging or malicious things about Miss Ross, and that without subterfuge. At last there came a climax.

She had sent for him (for he did not invariably go into her room before the beginning of the last act, as once he had done), and as she was still in the inner apartment, he took a chair, and stretched out his legs, and flicked a spot or two of dust from his silver-buckled shoes.

"What hour did you get home *this* morning?" she called to him, in rather a saucy tone.

"I don't know exactly."

"And don't care. You are leading a pretty life," she went on, rather indiscreetly, for Jane

was with her. "Distraction! Distraction from what! You sit up all night! you eat supper at all hours of the morning; you get dyspepsia and indigestion; and of course you become low-spirited—then there must be distraction. If you would lead a wholesome life, you wouldn't need any distraction."

"Oh, don't worry," he said, impatiently.

"What's come over that Italian friend of yours—that Miss Ross?"

"I don't know."

"You've never heard anything of her?"

"No—nothing."

"Don't you call that rather cool on her part? You introduce her to this theatre, you get her an engagement, you befriend her in every way, and all of a sudden she bolts, without a thank you!"

"I presume Miss Ross is the best judge of her own actions," said he, stiffly.

"Oh, you needn't be so touchy!" said *Grace Mainwaring*, as she came forth in all the splendour of her bridal array, and at once proceeded to the mirror. "But I can quite understand your not liking having been treated in that fashion. People often are deceived in their friends, aren't they? And there's nothing so horrid as ingratitude."

Certainly she ought to have been grateful to you, considering the fuss you made about her—the whole company remarked it!”

He did not answer; he did not even look her way; but there was an angry cloud gathering on his brows.

“No; very ungrateful I call it,” she continued, in the same dangerously supercilious tone. “You take up some creature you know nothing about, and befriend her, and even make a spectacle of yourself through the way you run after her, and all at once she says, ‘Good-bye; I’ve had enough of you’—and that’s all the explanation you get!”

“Oh, leave Miss Ross alone, will you!” he said, in accents that might have warned her.

Perhaps she was unheeding; perhaps she was stung into retort; at all events she turned and faced him.

“Leave her alone?” she said, with a flash of defiance in her look. “It is you who ought to leave her alone! She has cheated you—why should you show temper? Why should you sulk with every one, simply because an Italian organ-grinder has shown you what she thinks of you? Oh, I suppose the heavens must fall, because

you've lost your pretty plaything—that made a laughing-stock of you! You don't even know where she is?—I can tell you!—she's wandering along in front of the pavement at Brighton, in a green petticoat and a yellow handkerchief on her head, and singing to a concertina! That's about it, I should think; and very likely the seedy swell is waiting for her in their lodgings—waiting for her to bring the money home!”

Lionel rose; he said not a word; but the pallor of his face and the fire in his eyes were terrible to see. Plainly enough she saw them; but she was only half-terrified; she seemed aroused to a sort of whirlwind of passion.

“Oh, say it!” she cried. “Why don't you say it! Do you think I don't see it in your eyes! ‘*I hate you!*’—that's what you want to say; and you haven't the courage—you're a man and you haven't the courage!”

That look did not depart from his face; but he stood in silence for a second, as if considering whether he should speak. His self-control infuriated her all the more.

“Do you think I care!” she exclaimed, with panting breath. “Do you think I care whether you hate me or not—whether you go sighing all

day after your painted Italian doll! And do you imagine I want to wear this thing—that it is for this I will put up with every kind of insult and neglect? Not I!”

She pulled the bit of india-rubber from her finger, she dragged off the engagement-ring and dashed it on the floor in front of his feet—while her eyes sparkled with rage, and the cherry-paste hardly concealed the whiteness of her lips.

“Take it—and give it to the organ-grinder!” she called, in the madness of her rage.

He did not even look whither the ring had rolled. Without a single word he quite calmly turned and opened the door and passed outside. Nay, he was so considerate as to leave the door open for her; for he knew she would be wanted on the stage directly. He himself went up into the wings—in his gay costume of satin and silk, and powdered wig, and ruffles.

Had the audience only known, during the last act of this comedy, what fierce passions were agitating the breasts of the two chief performers in this pretty play, they might have looked on with added interest. How could they tell that the gallant and dashing *Harry Thornhill* was in his secret heart filled with anger and scorn

whenever he came near his charming sweetheart: how could they divine that the coquettish *Grace Mainwaring* was not thinking of her wiles and graces at all, but was on the road to a most piteous repentance? The one was saying to himself, 'Very well, let the vixen go to the devil: a happy riddance!' and the other was saying 'Oh, dear me, what have I done!—why did he put me in such a passion!' But the public in the stalls were all unknowing. They looked on and laughed, or looked on and sate solemn and stolid, as happened to be their nature; and then they slightly clapped their pale-gloved hands; and rose and donned their cloaks and coats. They had forgotten what the piece was about by the time they reached their broughams.

Later on, at the stage-door, whither a four-wheeler had been brought for her, Miss Burgoyne lingered. Presently Lionel came along. He would have passed her, but she intercepted him; and in the dusk outside she thrust forth her hand.

"Will you forgive me, Lionel? I ask your pardon," she said in an undertone that was suggestive of tears. "I don't know what made me say such things—I didn't mean them—I'm very sorry. See," she continued, and in the dull

lamplight she showed him her ungloved hand, with the engagement-ring in its former place, "I have put on the ring again. Of course you are hurt and offended; but you are more forgiving than a woman—a man should be. I will never say a word against her again; I should have remembered how you were companions before she came to England; and I can understand your affection for her, and your—your regret about her going away. Now will you be generous?—will you forgive me?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right," he said—as he was bound to say.

"But that's not enough. Will you come now and have some supper with Jim and me, and we'll talk about everything—except that one thing?"

"No, thanks, I can't; I have an engagement," he made answer.

She hesitated for a moment. Then she offered him her hand again.

"Well, at all events, bygones are to be bygones," she said. "And to-morrow I'm going to begin to knit a woollen vest for you, that you can slip on before you come out. Good night, dearest!"

"Good night," he said; and he opened the door of the cab for her; and told the cabman her

address; then—rather slowly and absently—he set out for the Garden Club.

The first person he beheld at the Garden Club was Octavius Quirk—of course at the supper-table.

“Going to Lady Adela’s on the 3rd?” said the bilious-looking Quirk, in a gay manner.

“I should want to be asked first,” was Lionel’s simple rejoinder.

“Ah,” said the other, complacently. “I heard you had not been much there lately. A charming house—most interesting—quite delightful to see people of their station so eagerly devoted to the arts. Music, painting, literature—all the elegancies of life—and all touched with a light and graceful hand. You should read some of Lady Adela’s descriptions in her new book—not seen it?—no?—ah, well, it will be out before long for the general world to read. As I was saying, her descriptions of places abroad are simply charmin’—charmin’. There’s where the practised traveller comes in; no heavy and laborious work; the striking peculiarities hit off with the most delicate appreciation; the *fine fleur* of difference noted everywhere. Your bourgeois goes and rams his bull’s head against everything he meets; he’s in wonderment and ecstasy almost before he lands;

he stares with astonishment at a fisherwoman on Calais pier; and weeps maudlin tears over the masonry of the Sainte Chapelle. Then Lady Adela's style—marvellous, marvellous. I give you my word as an expert! Full of distinction; choice; fastidious; penetrated everywhere by a certain *je ne sais quoi* of dexterity and aptitude; each word charged with colour, as a critic might say. You have not seen any of the sheets?" continued Mr. Quirk, with his mouth full of steak and olives. "Dear me! You haven't quarrelled with Lady Adela, have you? I did hear there was some little disappointment that you did not get Lady Sybil's 'Soldiers' Marching Song' introduced at the New Theatre; but I dare say the composer wouldn't have his operetta interfered with. Even you are not all-powerful. However, Lady Adela is unreasonable if she has taken offence: I will see that it is put right."

"I wouldn't trouble you—thanks!" said Lionel, rather coldly; and then, having eaten a biscuit and drank a glass of claret and water, he went upstairs to the card-room.

There were two tables occupied—one party playing whist, the other poker; to the latter Lionel idly made his way.

"Coming in, Moore?"

"Oh, yes, I'll come in. What are you playing?"

"Usual thing: sixpenny ante and ten-shilling limit."

"Let's have it a shilling ante and a sovereign limit," he proposed, as they made room for him at the table, and to this they agreed, and the game began.

At first Lionel could get no hands at all; but he never went out; sometimes he drew four cards to an ace or a queen, sometimes he took the whole five; while his losses, if steady, were not material. Occasionally he bluffed, and got a small pot; but it was risky, as he was distinctly in a run of bad luck. At last he was dealt nine, ten, knave, queen, ace, in different suits. This looked better.

"How many?" asked the dealer.

"I will take one card, if you please," he said, throwing away the ace.

He glanced at the card, as he put it into his hand: it was a king; he had a straight. Then he watched what the others were taking. The player on his left also asked for one—a doubtful intimation. His next neighbour asked for two—probably he had three of a kind. The dealer threw up his cards. The Age had already taken three—no

doubt he had started with the common or garden pair.

It was Lionel's turn to bet.

"Well," said he, "I will just go five shillings on this little lot."

"I will see your five shillings, and go a sovereign better," said his neighbour.

"That's twenty-five shillings for me to come in," said he who had taken two cards. "Well, I'll raise you another sovereign."

The Age went out.

"Two sovereigns against me," said Lionel. "Very well, then, I'll just raise you another."

"And another."

This frightened the third player, who incontinently retired. There were now left in only Lionel and his antagonist; and each had drawn but one card. Now the guessing came in. Had the player been drawing to two pairs, or to fill a flush or a straight; had he got a full hand; or was he left with his two pairs; or, again, had he failed to fill, and was he betting on a perfectly worthless lot? At all events the two combatants kept hammering away at each other, until there was a goodly pile of gold on the table, and the interest of the silent onlookers was proportionately

increased. Were both bluffing, and each afraid to call the other? Or was it that cruel and horrible combination—a full hand betting against four of a kind?

“I call you,” said Lionel’s enemy, at length, as he put in the last sovereign he had on the table.

“A straight,” was Lionel’s answer, as he showed his cards.

“Not good enough, my boy,” said the other, as he calmly ranged a flush of diamonds before him.

“Take away the money, Johnny,” said Lionel, as if it were a matter of no moment. “Or wait a second: I’ll go you double or quits.”

But here there was an almost general protest.

“Oh, what’s the use of that, Moore! It was the Duke who brought that nonsense in; and it ought to be stopped; it spoils the game. Stick to the legitimate thing. When you once begin that stupidity, there’s no stopping it.”

However, the player whom Lionel had challenged had no mind to deny him.

“For the whole pot, or for what you put in?” he asked.

“Either—whichever you like,” Lionel said, carelessly.

“We’ll say the whole pot, then: either I give

you what's on the table, or you double it," the lucky young gentleman made answer, as he proceeded to count the sovereigns and chips—there was 28*l.* in all. "Will you call to me? Very well. What do you say this is?"

Lionel spun a sovereign.

"I say it's a head."

"You've made a mistake, then—very sorry," said the other, as he raked in his own money.

"I owe you 28*l.*, Johnny," Lionel said, without more ado; and he took out his note-book and jotted it down. Then they went on again.

Now the game of poker is played in calm: happy is he who can preserve a perfectly expressionless face through all its vicissitudes. But the game of whiskey-poker (which is no game) is played amid vacuous excitement and strong language and derisive laughter—especially towards four in the morning. The whole of this little party seemed ready to go; in fact, they had all risen, and were standing round the table; but nevertheless they remained, while successive hands were dealt, face upwards. At first only a sovereign each was staked; then two; then three; then four; then five—and there a line was drawn. But in staking five sovereigns every time, with four to one against

you, a considerable amount of money can be lost ; and Lionel had been in ill luck all the sitting. He did not, however, seem to mind his losses, so long as the fierce spirit of gambling could be kept up ; and it was with no desperate effort at recovering his money that he was always for increasing the stakes. He would have sat down at the table and gone on indefinitely with this frantic plunging but that his companions declared they must go directly : at last three of them solemnly swore they would have only one round more. There were then left in only Lionel and the young fellow who had won his 28*l.* early in the evening.

“ Johnny, I’ll go you once for twenty pounds,” Lionel said.

“ Done with you.”

“ I say, you fellows,” protested one of the bystanders, “ you’ll smash up this club—you’ll have the police shutting it up as a gambling hell. Besides, you’re breaking the rules : you’ll have the Committee expelling you.”

“ What rules ? ” Lionel’s opponent asked, wheeling round.

“ The amount of the stakes, for one thing ; and playing after three o’clock, for another,” was the answer.

"I'll bet you ten pounds there's no limit as to time in the rules of this club—I mean as regards card-playing," the young man said, boldly.

"I take you."

The bell was rung; a waiter was sent to fetch a List of Members; and then he who had accepted the bet read out these solemn words—

"Rule XIX. No higher stakes than guinea points shall ever be played for, nor shall any Card or Billiard playing be permitted in the Club after 3 A.M."

"There's your confounded money: what a fool of a club to let you stay here all night if you like, and to stop card playing at three!" He turned to Lionel. "Well, Moore, what did you say, 20*l*.? I'll just make it thirty, if you like, and see if I can't get back that 10*l*."

"Right with you, Johnny."

The young man dealt the two hands: he found he had a pair of fours, Lionel nothing but a king. The winner took over the loser's I.O.U. for the £30; and then said—

"Well, now, I'll go you double or quits."

"Oh, certainly," said Lionel, "if you like. But I don't think you should. You are the winner: stick to what you've got."

"Oh, I'll give you a chance to get it all back," the young man said; and this time Lionel dealt the cards. And again the latter lost—having to substitute an I.O.U. for £60 for its predecessor.

"Well, now, I'll give you one more chance," the winner said, with a laugh.

"I'm hanged if you shall, Johnny!" said one of the bystanders; and he had the courage to intervene and snatch up the cards. "Come away to your beds, boys, and stop that nonsense! You've lost enough, Moore; and this fellow would go on till Doomsday."

But that insatiate young man was not to be beaten, after all. When they were separating in the street below, he drew Lionel aside.

"Look here, old man, why should we be deprived of our final little flutter? I want to give you a chance of getting back the whole thing."

"Not at all, my good fellow," Lionel said, with a smile. "Why don't you keep the money and rest content? Do you think I grudge it to you?"

"Come!—an absolutely last double or quits!" said the other, and he pulled out a coin from his pocket and put it between his two palms. "Heads or tails—and then go home happy!"

"Well, since you challenge me, I'll go this once more, and this once more only. I call a tail."

The upper hand was removed: in the dull lamp-light the dusky gold coin was examined.

"It's a head," said Lionel, "so that's all right, and it's you who are to go home happy. I'll settle up with you to-morrow evening. Do you want this hansom?—I don't: I think I'd rather walk. Good-night, Johnny!"

It was a long price to pay for a few hours of distraction and forgetfulness; still, he had had these; and the loss of the money, *per se*, did not affect him much. He walked away home. When he reached his rooms, there were some letters for him lying on the table; he took them and looked at them; he noticed one handwriting that used to be rather more familiar. This letter he opened first.

"Aivron Lodge, Campden Hill, Feb. 23.

MY DEAR MR. MOORE,

It is really quite shocking the way you have neglected us of late, and I, at least, cannot imagine any reason. Perhaps we have both been in fault. My sisters and I have all been very busy, in our several ways; and then it is awkward you should have only the one Sunday evening free—But there, let *bygones* be *bygones*, and come and dine with us on Sunday, March 3,

at 8. Forgive the short notice ; I've had some little trouble in trying to secure one or two people whom I don't know very well, and I couldn't fix earlier. The fact is I want it to be an *intellectual* little dinner ; and who could represent music and the drama so fitly as yourself ? I want only people with brains at it—perhaps you wouldn't include Rockminster in that category, but I must have him to help me, as my husband is away in Scotland looking after his beasts. Now do be good-natured, dear Mr. Moore, and say you will come.

And I am going to try your goodness another way. You remember speaking to me about a friend of yours who was connected with newspapers, and who knew some of the London correspondents of the provincial journals ? Could you oblige me with his address, and the correct spelling of his name ? I presume he would not consider it out of the way if I wrote to him as being a friend of yours, and enclosed a card of invitation. I want to have *all the talents*—that is, all of them I can get to come and honour the house of a mere novice and beginner. I did not catch either your friend's surname or his Christian name.

Ever yours sincerely,

ADELA CUNYNGHAM."

He tossed the letter on to the table.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "how much of that is meant for me, and how much for Maurice Mangan and newspaper paragraphs."

But it was high time to get to bed; and that he did without any serious fretting over his losses at the Garden Club. These had amounted, on the whole gamble, to nearly 170*l.*; which might have made him pause. For did he not owe responsibilities elsewhere? If he went on at this rate (he ought to have been asking himself) whence was likely to come the money for the plenishing of a certain small household—an elegant little establishment towards which Miss Kate Burgoyne was no doubt now looking forward, with pleased and expectant eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

IN A DEN OF LIONS, AND THEREAFTER.

WHEN Maurice Mangan, according to appointment, called at Lionel's rooms on the evening of Lady Adela Cunyngham's dinner-party, he was surprised to find his friend seated in front of the fire, wrapped up in a dressing-gown.

"Linn, what's the matter with you!" he exclaimed, looking at him. "Are you ill? What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh, nothing," was the answer. "I have been rather worried and out of sorts lately, that is all. And I can't go to that dinner to-night, Maurice. Will you make my excuses for me, like a good fellow? Tell Lady Adela I'm awfully sorry——"

"I'm sure I shan't do anything of the sort," Mangan said, promptly. "Do you think I am going to leave you here all by yourself? You know why I accepted the invitation—mere curiosity:

I wanted to see you among those people—I wanted to describe to Miss Francie how you looked when you were being adored——”

“My dear chap, you would have seen nothing of the sort,” Lionel said. “To-night there is to be a shining galaxy of genius, and each particular star will be eager to absorb all the adoration that is going. Authors, actors, painters, musicians—that kind of people: kid-gloved Bohemia.”

“Come, Linn; rouse yourself, man,” his friend protested. “You’ll do no good moping here by the fire. There’s still time for you to dress; I came early in case you might want to walk up to Campden Hill. And you shouldn’t disappoint your friends, if this is to be so great an occasion.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Lionel said, and he rose wearily, “though I would twenty times rather go to bed. You can find a book for yourself, Maurice: I shan’t keep you many minutes——” and with that he disappeared into his dressing-room.

A four-wheeler carried them up to Campden Hill: a welcome glow of light shone forth on the carriage-drive and the dark bushes. As they entered and crossed the wide hall, they were preceded by a young lady whose name was at the

same moment announced at the door of the drawing-room—"Miss Gabrielle Grey."

"Oh, really," said Mangan to his companion, as they were leaving their coats and hats. "I always thought 'Gabrielle Grey' was the pseudonym of an elderly clergyman's widow, or somebody of that kind."

"But who is Miss Gabrielle Grey?"

"You mean to say you have never even heard of her? Oh, she writes novels—very popular, too—and very deservedly so, for that kind of thing—excellent in tone, highly moral, and stuffed full of High Church sentiment; and I can tell you this, Linn, my boy, that for a lady novelist to have plenty of High Church sentiment at her command is about equivalent to holding four of a kind at poker—and that's an illustration you'll understand. Now come and introduce me to my hostess, and tell me who all the people are."

Lady Adela received both Lionel and his friend in the most kindly manner.

"What a charming photograph that is of you in evening dress," she said to Lionel. "Really, I've had to lock away my copy of it; girls are such thieves nowadays; they think nothing of picking up whatever pleases them and popping it

in their pocket." And therewith Lady Adela turned to Mr. Quirk, with whom she had been talking; and the new comers passed on, and found themselves in a corner, from whence they could survey the room.

The first glance revealed to Lionel that if all the talents were there, the 'quality' was conspicuously absent.

"I know hardly anybody here," he said in an undertone to Mangan.

"Oh, I know some of them," was the answer, also in undertone. "Rather small lions—I think she might have done better, with proper guidance. But perhaps this is only a beginning. Isn't your friend Quirk a picture! Who is the remarkably handsome girl just beyond?"

"That is Lady Adela's sister, Lady Sybil."

"The composer? I see: that's why she's talking to that portentous old ass, Schweinkopf, the musical critic. Then there's Miss Gabrielle Grey—poor thing, she's not very pretty—'I was not good enough for man, and so am given to'—publishers. By Jove, there's Ichabod—standing by the door: don't you know him?—Egerton—but they call him Ichabod at the Garrick. Now what could our hostess expect to get out of Ichabod?"

He has nothing left to him but biting his nails like the senile Pope or Pagan in the Pilgrim's Progress."

"What does he do?"

"He's a reviewer, *et præterea nihil*. Some twenty years ago he wrote two or three novels, but people wouldn't look at them, and so he became morose about the public taste and modern literature. In fact, there has been no English literature—for twenty years: this is his wail and moan whenever an editor allows him to lift up his voice. It was feeble on the part of your friend to ask Ichabod: she won't get anything out of him. I can see a reason for most of the others—those whom I know; but Ichabod is hopeless."

Mangan suddenly ceased these careless comments: his attention was arrested by the entrance of a tall young lady who came in very quietly—without being announced even.

"I say, who's that!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

And Lionel had been startled too; for he had convinced himself ere he came that Honnor Cunngham was certain to be in Scotland. But there she was, as distinguished-looking, as self-possessed as ever; her glance direct and simple and calm,



though she seemed to hesitate for a moment as if seeking for some one whom she might know in the crowd. From the fact of her not having been announced, Lionel guessed that she was staying in the house; perhaps, indeed, she had been in the drawing-room before. He hardly knew what to do. He forgot to answer his friend's question. If dinner were to be happily announced now, would it not save her from some embarrassment if he and she could go their separate ways without meeting; and thereafter he could leave without returning to the drawing-room? Yet, if she was staying in the house, she must have known that he was coming?

All this swift consideration was the work of a single second; the next second Miss Honnor's eyes had fallen upon the young man; and immediately and in the most natural way in the world she came across the room to him. It is true that there was a slight touch of colour visible on the gracious forehead when she offered him her hand; but there was no other sign of self-consciousness; and she said quite quietly and simply—

"It is some time since we have met, Mr. Moore; but of course I notice your name in the papers frequently."

"I hardly expected to see you here to-night," he

said, in reply. "I thought you would be off to Scotland for the salmon-fishing."

"I go to-morrow night," she made answer.

At the same moment Lord Rockminster came up, holding a bit of folded paper furtively in his hand: the faithful brother looked perplexed, for he had to remember the names of these various strangers; but here at least were two whom he did know.

"Mr. Moore, will you take Miss Cunyngham in to dinner?" he murmured as he went by; so that Lionel found there would have been no escape for him in any case. But now that the first little awkwardness of their meeting was over, there was nothing else. Miss Cunyngham spoke to him quite pleasantly and naturally—though she did not meet his eyes much. Meantime dinner was announced, and Lord Rockminster led the way with a trim little elderly lady whom Lionel afterwards discovered to be (for she told him as much) the London correspondent to a famous Parisian journal devoted to fashions and the *beau monde*.

And here he was seated side by side with Honnor Cunyngham, talking to her, listening to her, and with no sort of perturbation whatever. He began to ask himself whether he had ever been in love

with her—whether he had not rather been in love with her way of life and its surroundings. He was thinking not so much of her as of her departure on the morrow, and the scenes that lay beyond. Why had he not £10,000 a year—£5,000—nay, £1,000 a year—and freedom? Why could he not warm his soul with the knowledge that the salmon-rods were all packed and waiting in the hall; that new casting-lines had been put in the fly-book; that only the short drive up to Euston and a single black night lay between him and all the wide wonder of the world that would open out thereafter? Forth from the darkness into a whiter light—a larger day—a sweeter air; for now we are among the russet beech-hedges, the deep green pines, the purple hills touched here and there with snow; and the far-stretching landscape is shining in the morning sun; and the peewits are wheeling hither and thither in the blue. Then we are thundering through rocky chasms, and watching the roaring brown torrent beneath; or panting or struggling away up the lonely altitudes of Drumouchter; and again merrily racing and chasing down into the spacious valley of the Spey. And what for the end?—the long, still strath after leaving Invershin—the penetration

into the more secret solitudes—the peaks of Coulmore and Suilven in the west—and here the Aivron making a murmuring music over its golden gravel! There is a smell of peat in the air; there are children's voices about the keepers' cottages; and here is the handsome old Robert, rejoiced that the year has opened again, and Miss Honnor come back! 'Well, Robert, you must come in and have a dram, and I will show you the tackle I've brought with me.' 'I am not wishing for a dram, Miss Honnor, so much as I am glad to see you back again, ay, and looking so well!' . . .

"Mr. Moore," she said (and she startled him out of his reverie), "do you ever give a little dinner-party at your rooms?"

"Well, seldom," he said. "You see, I have only the one evening in the week; and I have generally some engagement or other."

"I should like to send you a salmon, if it would be of any use to you," she went on to say.

"Thank you very much: I would rather see you hook and land it than have the compliment of its being sent to me twenty times over. I was thinking this very minute of the Aivron, and your getting down to the ford the day after to-morrow, and old Robert being there to welcome you. I

envy him—and you. Are you to be all by yourself at the Lodge?”

“For the present, yes,” Miss Honnor said. “My brother and Captain Waveney come at the beginning of April. Of course it is rather hazardous going just now; the river might be frozen over for a fortnight at a time; but that seldom happens. And in ordinarily mild weather it is very beautiful up there—the most beautiful time of the year, I think; the birch-woods are all of the clearest lilac, and the brackens turned to deep crimson; then the bent grass on the higher hills—what they call deer’s-hair—is a mass of gold. And I don’t in the least mind being alone in the evening—in fact, I enjoy it. It is a splendid time for reading. There is not a sound. Caroline comes in from time to time to pile on more peats and sweep the hearth; then she goes out again; and you sit in an easy-chair with your back to the lamp; and if you’ve got an interesting book, what more company do you want? Then it’s very early to bed in Strathaivron; and I’ve got a room that looks both ways—across the strath and down; and sometimes there is moonlight making the windows blue; or if there isn’t, you can lie and look at the soft red light thrown out by the peat,

until the silence is too much for you, and you are asleep before you have had time to think of it. Now tell me about yourself," she suddenly said. "I hope the constant work and the long and depressing winter have not told on you. It must have been very unpleasant getting home so late at night during the fogs."

He would rather she had continued talking about the far Aivron and the Geinig; he did not care to come back to the theatre and Kate Burgoyne.

"One gets used to everything, I suppose," he said.

"But still it must be gratifying to you to be in so successful a piece—to be aware of the delight you are giving evening after evening to so many people," Miss Honnor reminded him. "By the way, how is the pretty Italian girl—the young lady you said you had known in Naples?"

"She has left the New Theatre," he answered, not lifting his eyes.

"Oh, really. Then I'm sure that must have been unfortunate for the operetta; for she had such a beautiful voice—she sang so exquisitely—and besides that there was so much refinement and grace in everything she did. I remember

mother was so particularly struck with her; we have often spoken of her since; her manner on the stage was so charming—so gentle and graceful—it had a curious fascination that was irresistible. And I confess I was delighted with the little touch of foreign accent: perhaps if she had not been so very pretty one would have been less ready to be pleased with everything. And where is she now, Mr. Moore?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Lionel said, rather unwillingly: he would rather not have been questioned.

"And is that how friendships in the theatre are kept up?" Miss Honnor asked, reproachfully. "But it is all very well for us idle folk to talk. I suppose you are all far too busy to give much time to correspondence."

"No, we have not much time for letter writing," he said absently.

Indeed it was well for him that he had this companion who could talk to him in her quiet, low tones; for he was out of spirits, and inclined to be silent; and certainly he had no wish to join in the frothy discussion which Octavius Quirk had started at the upper end of the table. Mr. Mellord, the famous Academician, had taken in Lady Adela

to dinner; but she had placed Mr. Quirk on her left hand; and from this position of authority he was roaring away like any sucking-dove and challenging everybody to dispute his windy platitudes. Lord Rockminster, down at the other end, mute and in safety, was looking on at this motley little assemblage, and probably wondering what his three gifted sisters would do next. It was hard that he had no Miss Georgie Lestrangle to amuse him: perhaps Miss Georgie had been considered ineligible for admission into this intellectual coterie. Poor man!—and to think he might have been dining in solitary comfort at his club, at a quiet little table, with two candles, and a Sunday paper propped up by the water-bottle! But he betrayed no impatience; he sate, and looked, and meditated.

However, when dinner was over, and the ladies had left the room, he had to go and take his sister's place, so that he found himself in the thick of the babble. Mr. Quirk was no longer goring spider's-webs; he was now attacking a solid and substantial subject—nothing less than the condition of the British army; and a pretty poor opinion he seemed to have of it. As it chanced, the only person who had seen service

was Lord Rockminster (at Knightsbridge), but he did not choose to open his mouth; so that Mr. Quirk had it all his way—except when Maurice Mangan thought it worth while to give him a cuff or a kick, just by way of reminding him that he was mortal. Ichabod, in silence, stuck to the port-wine. Quincey Hooper, the American journalist, drew in a chair by the side of Lord Rockminster, and humbly fawned. And meanwhile Quirk, head downward, so to speak, charged rank and file, and sent them flying; arose again and swept the heads off officers; and was just about to annihilate the volunteers when Mangan interrupted him.

“Oh, you expect too much,” he said, in his slow and half-contemptuous fashion. “The British soldier is not over well-educated, I admit; but you needn’t try him by an impossible standard. I dare say you are thinking of ancient days when a Roman general could address his troops in Latin and make quite sure of being understood; but you can’t expect Tommy Atkins to be so learned. And our Generals, as you say, may chiefly distinguish themselves at reviews; but the reviews they seem to me to be too fond of are those published monthly. As for the volunteers——”

"You will have a joke about them too, I suppose," Quirk retorted. "An excellent subject for a joke—the safety of the country! A capital subject for a merry jest: Nero fiddling with Rome in flames——"

"I beg your pardon; Nero never did anything of the kind," Mangan observed, with a perfectly diabolical inconsequence, "for violins weren't invented in those days."

This was too much for Mr. Quirk; he would not resume argument with such a trifler; nor, indeed, was there any opportunity; for Lord Rockminster now suggested they should go into the drawing-room—and Ichabod had to leave that decanter of port.

Now, if Maurice Mangan had come to this house to see how Lionel was fêted and caressed by 'the great'—in order that he might carry the tale down to Winstead, to please the old folk and Miss Francie—he was doomed to disappointment. There were very few of 'the great' present, to begin with; and those who were paid no particular attention to Lionel Moore. It was Octavius Quirk who appeared to be the hero of the evening, so far as the attention devoted to him by Lady Adela and her immediate little circle was con-

cerned. But Maurice himself was not wholly left neglected. When tea was brought in, his hostess came over to where he was standing.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Mangan?—I want to talk to you about something of very great importance—importance to me, that is, for you know how vain young authors are. You have heard of my new book?—yes, I thought Mr. Moore must have told you. Well, it's all ready, except the title-page. I am not quite settled about the title yet; and you literary gentlemen are so quick and clever with suggestions—I am sure you will give me good advice. And I've had a number of different titles printed, to see how they look in type: what do you think of this one? At present it seems to be the favourite: it was Mr. Quirk's suggestion—"

She showed him a slip with *North and South* printed on it in large letters.

"I don't like it at all," Mangan said, frankly. "People will think the book has something to do with the American Civil War. However, don't take my opinion. My connection with literature is almost infinitesimal—I'm merely a newspaper hack, you know—"

"What you say about the title is *quite* right;

and I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Mangan," Lady Adela said, with almost pathetic emphasis. "The American war, of course: I never thought of that!"

"What is Ichabod's choice?—I beg your pardon; I mean have you shown the titles to Mr. Egerton?"

"I'm afraid he doesn't approve of any of them," said Lady Adela, sadly turning over the slips.

"No, I suppose not; good titles went out with good fiction—when he ceased to write novels a number of years ago. May I look at the others?"

She handed him the slips.

"Well, now, there is one that in my poor opinion would be rather effective—*Lotus and Lily*—a pretty sound—"

"Yes—perhaps," said Lady Adela, doubtfully; "but then, you see, it has not much connection with the book. The worst of it is that all the novel is printed—all but the three title-pages. Otherwise I might have called my heroine Lily—"

"But I fear you could not have called your hero Lotus," said Mangan, gravely. "Not very well. However, it is no use speculating on that now, as you say. What is the next one?—*Transformation*."

Of course you know that Hawthorne wrote a book under that title, Lady Adela?"

"Yes," said she, cheerfully. "But there's no copyright in America; so why shouldn't I take the title if it suits?"

He hesitated; there seemed to be some ethical point here; moreover, he was not aware that *Transformation* was the English, not the American, title of Hawthorne's story. So he fell back on base expediency.

"It is a mistake for two authors to use the same title—I'm sure it is," said he. "Look at the confusion. The reviewers might pass over your novel, thinking it was only a new edition of Hawthorne's book."

"Yes, that's quite true," said Lady Adela, thoughtfully.

"Well, here is one," he continued. "*Sicily and South Kensington*: that's odd; that's new; that might take the popular fancy——"

"Do you know, that is a favourite of my own," Lady Adela said, with a slight eagerness, "for it really describes the book. You understand, Mr. Mangan, all the first part is about the South of Italy; and then I come to London and try to describe everything that is just going on round

about us. I have put *everything* in ; so that really —though I shouldn't praise myself—but it isn't praise at all, Mr. Mangan, it is merely telling you what I have aimed at—and really any one taking up my poor little book some hundred years hence might very fairly assume that it was a correct picture of all that was going on in the reign of Queen Victoria. I do not say that it is well done ; not at all ; that would be self-praise ; but I do think it may have some little historical value. Modern life is so busy, so hurried, and so complex that it is difficult to form any impression of it as a whole ; I take up book after book, written by living authors with whom I shouldn't dream of comparing myself ; and yet I see how small a circle their characters work in. You would think the world consisted of only eight or ten people ; and that there was hardly room for them to move. They never get away from each other ; they don't mix in the crowd ; there is no crowd. But here in my poor way I am trying to show what a panorama London is —always changing—occupations, desires, struggles following one another in breathless rapidity—in short, I want to show modern life as it is, not as it is dreamed of by clever authors who live in a study. Now that is my excuse, Mr. Mangan, for

being such a dreadful bore; and I am so much obliged to you for your kind advice about the title; it is so easy for clever people to be kind—just a word and it's done. Thank you," said she, as he took her cup from her and placed it on the table; and then, before she left him, she ventured to say, with a charming modesty: "I'm sure you will forgive me, Mr. Mangan, but if I were to send you a copy of the book, might I hope that you would find ten minutes to glance over it?"

"I am certain I shall read it with very great interest," said he; and that was strictly true; for this Lady Adela Cunyngham completely puzzled him; she seemed so extraordinary a combination of a clever woman of the world and an awful fool.

And Lionel? Well, he had got introduced to Miss Gabrielle Grey, whom he found to be a very quiet, shy, pensive sort of creature, not posing as a distinguished person at all. He dared not talk to her of her books, for he did not even know the names of them; but he let her understand that he knew she was an authoress, and it seemed to please her to know that her fame had penetrated into the mysterious regions behind the footlights. She began to question him, in a timid sort of way,

about his experiences—whether stage-fright was difficult to get over—whether he thought that the immediate and enthusiastic approbation of the public was a beneficial stimulant—whether the continuous excitement of the emotional nature tended to render it callous, or, on the other hand, more sensitive and sympathetic—and so forth: was she dimly looking forward to the conquest of a new domain, whither the young ladies of the rectory and the vicarage might be induced fearfully to follow her? But Lionel did not linger long in that drawing-room. He got Maurice Mangan away as soon as he could; they slipped out unobserved—especially as there were plenty of newcomers now arriving; when they had passed down through the back garden to the gate, the one lit a cigarette, and the other a pipe; and together they wended their way towards Kensington Road and Piccadilly.

“Why,” said Mangan, “I shall have quite a favourable report to carry down to Winstead. I did not see you treated with any of that unwholesome adulation I have heard so much of!”

“I am almost a stranger in the house, now,” Lionel said, briefly.

“Why?”

“Oh, various circumstances, of late.”

"They did not even ask you to sing," his friend said, in accents of some surprise.

"They dared not. Didn't you see that most of the people were strangers? How could Lady Adela be sure she might not be wounding somebody's susceptibilities by having operatic music on a Sunday evening? She knew nothing at all about half these people—they were merely names to her, that she had collected round her in order that she might count herself in among the arts."

"That ill-conditioned brute Quirk seemed to me to be dominating the whole thing," said Mangan, rather testily. "It's an awful price to pay for a few puffs. I wonder a woman like that can bear him to come near her; but she pets the baboon as if he were a King Charles spaniel. Linnie, my boy, you're no longer first favourite. I can see that. Self-interest has proved too strong; the flattering little review, the complimentary little notice, has ousted you. It isn't you who are privileged to meet my Lady Morgan in the street—

'And then to gammon her, in the *Examiner*,
With a paragraph short and sweet.'

Well, now, tell me about that very striking-looking girl—or woman, rather—whom you took in to

dinner. I asked you who she was when she came into the room."

"That was Miss Honnor Cunyngham."

"Not the salmon-fishing young lady I have heard you speak of?"

"Yes."

"Why, she didn't look like that," said Mangan, thoughtfully. "Not the least. She has got a splendid forehead — powerful and clear; and almost too much character about the square brows and the calm eyes. I should have taken her to be a strongly intellectual woman—of the finer and more reticent type. Well, well—a salmon-fisher!"

"Why shouldn't she be both?"

"Why, indeed?" said Maurice, absently; and therewith he relapsed (as was frequently his wont) into silence; and in silence the two friends pursued their way eastwards to Lionel's rooms.

But when they had arrived at their destination, when soda-water had been produced and opened, and when Mangan was lying back in an easy-chair, regarding his friend, he resumed the conversation.

"I should have thought going to see those people to-night would have brightened you up a little," he began, "but you seem thoroughly out-of-sorts, Linn. What is the matter? Over-work

or worry? I should not think over-work; I've never seen your theatre-business prove too much for you. Worry? What about, then?"

"There may be different things," Lionel said, evasively, as he brought over the spirit case. "I haven't been sleeping well of late—lying awake even if I don't go to bed till three or four; and I get a singing in my ears sometimes that is bothersome. Oh, never mind me; I'm all right."

"But I'm going to mind you; for you are not all right. Is it money?"

"No, no."

"What, then? There is something seriously worrying you."

"Oh, there are several things," Lionel exclaimed, forced at last into confession. "I can't think what has become of Nina Ross, that's one thing; if I only knew she was safe and well, I don't think I should mind the other things. No, not a bit. But there was something about her going away that I can't explain to you—only I—I was responsible in a sort of way; and Nina and I were always such good friends and companions—well, it's no use talking about that. Then there's another little detail," he added, with an air of indifference: "I'm engaged to be married."

Mangan stared at him.

"Engaged to be married?" he repeated, as if he had not heard aright. "To whom?"

"Miss Burgoyne."

"Miss Burgoyne—of the New Theatre?"

"The same."

"Are you out of your senses, Linn!" Maurice cried angrily.

"No, I don't think so," he said, and he went to the mantelpiece for a cigarette.

"How did it come about?" demanded Maurice again.

"Oh, I don't know. It isn't of much consequence, is it?" Lionel answered carelessly.

Then Maurice instantly reflected that, if this thing were really done, it was not for him to protest.

"Of course I say nothing against the young lady—certainly not. I thought she was very pleasant the night I was introduced to her, and nice-looking too. But I had no idea you were taken in that quarter, Linn: none—hence the surprise. I used to think you were in the happy position which Landor declared impossible. What were the lines?—I haven't seen them for twenty years—but they were something like this—

*'Fair maiden, when I look on thee,
I wish that I were young and free;
But both at once, ah, who could be?'*

I thought you were 'both at once'—and very well content. But supposing you have given up your freedom, why should that vex and trouble you? The engagement-time is said to be the happiest period of a man's life: what is wrong in your case?"

Lionel took a turn or two up and down the room.

"Well, I will tell you the truth, Maurice," he blurted out at last. "I got engaged to her in a fit of restlessness, or caprice, or some such ridiculous nonsense; and I don't regret it; I mean, I am willing to stand by it; but that is not enough for her—and I can look forward to nothing but a perpetual series of differences and quarrels. She expects me to play *Harry Thornhill* off the stage, I suppose."

Mangan looked at him for some time.

"Even between friends," he said, slowly, "there are some things it is difficult to talk about with safety. Of course you know what an outsider would say: that you had got into a devil of a mess—that you had blundered into an engagement

with a woman whom you find you don't want to marry."

"Well, is there anything uncommon in that?" Lionel demanded. "Is that an unusual experience in human life? But I don't admit as much, in my case. I am quite willing to marry her, so long as she keeps her temper, and doesn't expect me to play the fool. I dare say we shall get on well enough, like other people, after the fateful deed is done. In the meantime," he added, with a forced laugh, "in the meantime, I find myself now and again wishing I was a sailor brave and bold, careering round the Cape of Good Hope in a gale of wind, and with no loftier aspiration in my mind than a pint of rum and a well-filled pipe!"

"Faith, I think that's just where you ought to be," said Mangan, drily, "instead of in this town of London, at the present moment. I declare you've quite bewildered me. If you had told me you were engaged to that tall salmon-fishing girl—you used to talk about her a good deal, you know—or to that fascinating young Italian creature—and I've seen before now how easily the gentle friend and companion can be transformed into a sweetheart—I should have been ready with all

kinds of pretty speeches and good wishes. But Miss Burgoyne of the New Theatre? Linn, my boy, I've discovered what's the matter with you; and I can prescribe an absolutely certain cure."

"What is it?"

"The cure? You have partly suggested it yourself. You must go at once and take your passage in a sailing-ship for Australia. You can stay there for a time and examine the Colony; of course you'll write a book about it, like everybody else. Then you make your way to San Francisco; and accept a three months' engagement there. You come on to New York; and accept a three month's engagement there. And when you return to England, you will find that all your troubles have vanished, and that you are once again the Linn Moore we all of us used to know."

A wild fancy flashed through Lionel's brain: what if in these far wanderings he were suddenly to encounter Nina? In vain—in vain: Nina had become for him but a shadow, a ghost, with no voice to call to him from any sphere.

"You would have me run away?—I don't see how I can do that," he said quietly; and then he abruptly changed the subject. "What did you think of Lady Adela?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I've been wondering whether she was at the same time a smart and clever woman and an abject fool, or whether she was simply smart and clever and thought me an abject fool. It must be either one or the other. She played the literary *ingénue* very well—a little too openly perhaps. I'm curious about her book——"

"Oh, don't judge of her by her book!" Lionel exclaimed. "That isn't fair. Her book you may very likely consider foolish; but she isn't foolish—not at all. I suppose her head is a little bit turned by the things that Quirk and those fellows have been writing about her; but that's only natural. And if she showed her hand a little too freely in trying to interest you in her novel, you must remember how eager she is to succeed. You'll do what you can for her book—won't you, Maurice?"

Maurice Mangan, on his way home that night, had other things to think of than Lady Adela's poor little book. He saw clearly enough the embroilment into which Lionel had landed himself; but he could not see so clearly how he was to get out of it. One question he forgot to ask: what had induced that mood of petulance or

recklessness or both combined in which Lionel had wilfully and madly pledged away all his future life? However, the thing was done; here was his friend going forward to a *mariage de convenance* (where there was very little *convenance*, to be sure) with a sort of careless indifference, if not of bravado; while his bride, on the other hand, might surely be pardoned if she resented, and indignantly resented, his attitude towards her. What kind of prospect was this for two young people? Maurice thought that on the very first opportunity he would go away down to Winstead and talk the matter over with Francie: who than she more capable of advising in aught concerning Lionel's welfare?

Notwithstanding his intercession with Maurice on behalf of Lady Adela's forthcoming novel, Lionel did not seem disposed to resume the friendly relations with the people up at Campden Hill which had formerly existed. He did not even call after the dinner-party. If Mr. Octavius Quirk were for the moment installed as chief favourite at Aivron Lodge, he had no wish to interfere with him: there were plenty of other houses open, if one chose to go. But the fact is, Lionel now spent many afternoons and nearly

every evening at the Garden Club: whist before dinner, poker after supper, being the established rule. Moreover, a new element had been introduced, as far as he was concerned. Mr. Percival Miles had been elected a member of the club; and had forthwith presented himself in the card-room, where he at once distinguished himself by his bold and intrepid play. The curious thing was that, while openly professing a kind of cold acquaintanceship, it was invariably against Lionel Moore that he made his most determined stand; with the other players he might play an ordinarily discreet and cautious game; but when Moore could be challenged, this pale-faced young man never failed promptly to seize the opportunity. And the worst of it was that he had extraordinary luck, both in the run of the cards and in his manoeuvres.

“What is that young whipper-snapper up to?” Lionel said to himself, after a particularly bad night (and morning) as he sat staring into the dead ashes of his fireplace. “He wanted to take my life—until my good angel interfered and saved me. Now does he want to break me financially? By Jove, they’re coming near to doing it amongst them. I shall have to go to Moss to-morrow for

another £250. Well, what does it matter? The luck must turn some time. If it doesn't?—if it doesn't?—then there may come the trip before the mast, as the final panacea, according to Maurice. Australia?—there would be freedom there, and perhaps forgetfulness."

As he was passing into his bedroom he chanced to observe a package that was lying on a chair, and for a second he glanced at the handwriting of the address. It was Miss Burgoyne's. What could she want with him now? He cut the string, and opened the parcel: behold, here was the brown and scarlet woollen vest that she had knitted for him with her own fair hands. Why these impatiently down-drawn brows? A true lover would have passionately kissed this tender token of affection, and bethought him of all the hours, and half-hours, and quarters-of-an-hour, during which she had been employed in her pretty task, no doubt thinking of him all the time. Alas! the love-gift was almost angrily thrown on to the chair again—and he went into his own room.

CHAPTER V.

PRIUS DEMENTAT.

WHEN Maurice Mangan left the train at Winstead, and climbed out of the deep chalk cutting in which the station is buried, and emerged upon the open downs, he found himself in a very different world from that he had left. Far away behind him lay the great city (even now the dusky dome of St. Paul's was visible across the level swathes of landscape) with its miry ways, and teeming population, and continuous thunder of traffic; while here were the windy skies of a wild March morning, and swaying trees, and cawing rooks, and air that was sweet in the nostrils and soft to the throat. As he light-heartedly strode away across the undulations of blossoming gorse, fragments of song from his favourite poets chased each other through his brain; and somehow they were all connected with the glad opening out of the year.

. . . 'And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils' . . . 'Along the grass sweet airs are blown, our way this day in spring' . . . 'And in the gloamin o' the wood, the throssil whistled sweet.' . . . Mangan could sing no more than a crow; but he felt as if he were singing; there was a kind of music in the long stride, the quick pulse, the deep inhalations of the delicious air. For all was going to be well now; he was about to consult Francie as to Lionel's sad estate. He did not stay to ask himself whether it was likely that a quiet and gentle girl living in this secluded neighbourhood could be of much help in such a matter; it was enough that he was going to talk it all over with Miss Francie; things would be clearer then.

Now as you go up from Winstead Station to Winstead Village there is a strip of coppice that runs parallel with one part of the highway; and through this prolonged dingle a pathway meanders, which he who is not in a hurry may prefer to the road. Of course Mangan chose this pleasanter way, though he had to moderate his pace now because of the briars; and right glad was he to notice the various symptoms of the new-born life of the world—the pale anemones stirred by the

warm, moist breeze, the delicate blossoms of the little wood-sorrel, the budded raceme of the wild hyacinth; while loud and clear a blackbird sang from a neighbouring bough. He did not expect to meet anyone; he certainly did not expect to meet Miss Francie Wright, who would doubtless be away at her cottages. But all of a sudden he was startled by the apparition of a rabbit that came running towards him, and then, seeing him, bolted off at right angles; and as this caused him to look up from his botanising, here, unmistakably, was Miss Francie, coming along through the glade. Her pale complexion showed a little colour as she drew near; but there was not much embarrassment in the calm, kind eyes.

"This is indeed a stroke of good fortune," he said, "for I came down for the very purpose of having a talk with you all by yourself—about Lionel. But I did not imagine I should meet you here."

"I am going down to the station," she said. "I expect a parcel by the train you must have come by; and I want it at once."

"May I come with you and carry it for you?" he said promptly; and of course she could not refuse so civil an offer. The awkward part of the arrangement was that they had to go along

through this straggling strip of wood in single file, making a really confidential chat almost an impossibility; whereupon he proposed, and she agreed, that they should get out into the highway; and thereafter they went on to the station by the ordinary road.

But this task he had undertaken proved to be a great deal more difficult and delicate than he had anticipated. To have a talk with Francie—that seemed simple enough: it was less simple, as he discovered, to have to tell Lionel's cousin that the young man had gone and engaged himself to be married. Indeed, he beat about the bush for a considerable time.

"You see," he said, "a young fellow at his time of life, especially if he has been petted a good deal, is very apt to be wayward and restless, and likely to get into trouble through the mere impulsiveness, the recklessness of youth——"

"Mr. Mangan," Miss Francie said, with a smile in the quiet grey eyes, "why do you always talk of Linn as if he were so much younger than you? There is no great difference. You always speak as if you were quite middle-aged."

"I am worse than middle-aged—I am resigned, and read Marcus Aurelius," he said. "I suppose

I have taken life too easily. Youth is the time for fighting; there is no fight left in me at all; I accept what happens. Oh, by the way, when my book on Comte comes out, I may have to buckle on my armour again; I suppose there will be strife and war and deadly thrusts: unless, indeed, the Positivists may not consider me worth answering. However, that is of no consequence; it's about Linn I have come down; and really, Miss Francie, I fear he is in a bad way, and that he is taking a worse way to get out of it."

"I am very sorry to hear that," she said, gravely.

"And then he's such a good fellow!" Mangan continued. "If he were selfish, or cruel, or grasping, one might think that a few buffets from the world might rather be of service to him; but as it is I don't understand at all how he has got himself into such a position—or been entrapped into it: you see, I don't know Miss Burgoyne very well——"

"Miss Burgoyne?" she repeated, doubtfully.

"Miss Burgoyne of the New Theatre."

Then Mangan watched his companion timidly and furtively—which was a strange thing for him, for ordinarily his deep-set grey eyes were singularly intense and sincere.

"Perhaps I ought to tell you at once," he said, slowly, "that—that—the fact is, Lionel is engaged to be married to Miss Burgoyne."

"Lionel—engaged to be married?" she said, quickly, and she looked up. He met her eyes and read them: surely there was nothing there other than a certain pleased curiosity; she had forgotten that this engagement might be the cause of her cousin's trouble; she only seemed to think it odd that Linn was about to be married.

"Yes; and now I am afraid he regrets his rashness, and is in terrible trouble over it—or perhaps that is only one of several things. Well, I had made other forecasts for him," Mangan went on to say, with a little hesitation. "I could have imagined another future for him. Indeed, at one time, I thought that if ever he looked out for a wife, it would be—a little nearer home——"

Her eyes were swiftly downcast; but the next instant she had bravely raised them, and was regarding him.

"Do you mean me, Mr. Mangan?" she asked.

He did not answer; he left her to understand. Miss Francie shook her head, and there was a slight smile on her lips.

"No, no," she said, "that was never possible

at any time. Where was your clear sight, Mr. Mangan? Of course I am very fond of Linn; I have been so all my life; and there's nothing I wouldn't do to save him trouble or pain. But even a stupid country girl may form her ideal—and in my case Lionel never came anywhere near to that. I know he is good, and generous, and manly—he is quite wonderful considering what he has come through; but on the other hand—well—oh, well, I'm not going to say anything against Linn—I will not."

"I am sure you will not," said Mangan, quietly; and here they reached the station.

The parcel had not arrived; there was nothing for it but to retrace their steps; and on their way across the common they returned to Lionel and his wretched plight.

"Surely," said Miss Francie, with a touch of indignation in her voice, "surely, if Miss Burgoyne learns that he is fretting over this engagement, she will release him at once. No woman could be so shameless as to keep him to an unwilling bargain——"

"I am not so sure about that," Mangan made answer. "She may think she has affection for two, and that all will be well. It is a good match

for her. His position in his profession, and in society, will be advantageous to her. Then she may be vain of her conquest—so many different motives may come in. But the chief point is that Linn doesn't want to be released from this engagement; he declares he will abide by it—if only she doesn't expect him to be very affectionate. It is an extraordinary imbroglio altogether; I am beginning to believe that all the time he has been in love with that Italian girl whom he knew in Naples, and who was in the New Theatre for a while; and that now he has made the discovery, when it is too late, he doesn't care what happens to him. She has gone away; he has no idea where she is; here he is engaged to Miss Burgoyne, and quite willing to marry her; and in the meantime he plays cards heavily to escape from thinking. In fact, he is not taking the least care of himself; and you would be surprised at the change in his appearance, already. It isn't like Linn Moore to talk of going to bed when he ought to be setting out for a dinner-party; and the worst of it is he won't pay any heed to what you say to him. But something must be done: Linn is too good a fellow to be allowed to go to the mischief without some kind of protest or interference."

"If you like," said Miss Francie, slowly, "I will go to Miss Burgoyne. She is a woman; she could not but listen. She cannot want to bring misery on them both."

"No," said he, with a little show of authority. "Whatever we may try—not that. I have heard that Miss Burgoyne has a bit of a temper——"

"I am not afraid," said his companion, simply.

"No, no. If that were the only way, I should propose to go to Miss Burgoyne myself," he said. "But, you see, the awkward thing is that neither you nor I have any right to appeal to her, so long as Linn is willing to fulfil the engagement. We don't know her; we could not remonstrate as a friend of her own might. If we were to interfere on his behalf, she would immediately turn to him; and he is determined not to back out."

"Then what is to be done, Mr. Mangan!" she exclaimed, in despair.

"I—I don't quite see at present," he answered her. "I thought I would talk it over with you, Miss Francie. I thought there might be something in that; that the way might seem clearer. But I see no way at all; unless you were to go to him himself. He would listen to you. Or he might even listen to me, if I represented to him

that you were distressed at the condition of affairs. At present he doesn't appear to care what happens to him."

They had crossed the common; they had come to the foot of the wood; and they did not go on to the highway, for Miss Francie suggested that the sylvan path was the more interesting. And so they passed in among the trees, making their way through the straggling undergrowth; while the soft March wind blew moist and sweet all around them, and the blackbirds and thrushes filled the world with their silver melody, and in the more distant woods the ringdoves crooned. Maurice Mangan followed her—in silence. Perhaps he was thinking of Lionel; perhaps he was thinking of the confession she had made in crossing the common; at all events he did not address her; and when she stooped to gather some hyacinths and anemones, he merely waited for her. But as they drew near to the further end of the coppice, the path became clearer, and now he walked by her side.

"Miss Francie," he said (and it was his eyes that were cast down now), "you were speaking of the ideal that girls in the country may form for themselves—and girls everywhere, I dare say: but don't you think it rather hard?"

“What is?”

“Why, that you should raise up an impossible standard, and that poor common human beings, with all their imperfections and disqualifications, are sent to the right about?”

“Oh, no,” Miss Francie said cheerfully. “You don’t understand at all. A girl does not form her ideal out of her own head. She is not clever enough to do that; or rather, she is not stupid enough to try to do that. She takes her ideal from some one she knows—from the finest type of character she has met; so that it is not an impossible standard, for one person, at least, has attained to it.”

“And for the sake of that one, she discards all those unfortunates who, by their age, or appearance, or lack of position, or lack of distinction, cannot hope to come near,” he said, rather absently. “Isn’t that hard? It makes all sorts of things so hopeless, so impossible. You put your one chosen friend on this pedestal; and then all the others, who might wish to win your regard, they know what the result of comparison would be, and they go away home, and hide their heads.”

“I don’t see, Mr. Mangan,” she said, in a somewhat low voice, and yet a little proudly too, “why

you should fear comparison with any one—no, not with any one; or imagine that anything could—could displace you in the regard of your friends.”

He hesitated again—anxious, eager, and yet afraid. At last he said, rather sadly—

“I wish I knew something of your ideals, and how far away beyond human possibility they are.”

“Oh, I can tell you,” she said, plucking up heart of grace, for here was an easy way out of an embarrassing position. “My ideal woman is Sister Alexandra, of the East London Hospital. She was down here last Sunday—sweeter, more angelic than ever. That is the noblest type of woman I know. And I was so glad she enjoyed her rare holiday; and when she went away in the evening we had her just loaded with flowers for her ward.”

“And the ideal man?”

“Oh,” said Miss Francie, hurriedly, “I hardly know about that. Of course, when I—when I spoke of Linn a little while ago, I did not wish to say anything against him—certainly not—no one admires his better qualities more than I do—but—but there may be other qualities——”

They were come to the wooden gate opening on to the highway; he paused ere he lifted the latch.

“Francie,” said he, “do you think that some

day you might be induced to put aside all your high standards and ideals; and—and—in short, accept a battered old journalist, without money, position, distinction, without any graces, except this, that gratitude might add something to his affection for you ! ”

Tears sprang into her eyes, and yet there was a smile there, too : she was not wholly frightened—perhaps she had known all along.

“ Ah, and you don’t understand yet, Maurice ! ” she said, and she frankly gave him her hand, and her eyes were kind even through her tears. “ You don’t understand what I have been saying to you, that a girl’s ideal is one particular person—her ideal is the man or woman whom she admires and loves the most. Can you not guess ? ”

“ Francie, you will be my wife ? ” he said to her, drawing her closer to him, his hands clasped round her head.

She did not answer. She was silent for a second or two. And then she said with averted eyes—

“ You spoke of gratitude, Maurice. I know who has the most reason to be grateful—and who will try the hardest to show it.”

So that betrothal was complete ; and when they passed out from the coppice into the whiter air,

behold! the wild March skies had parted somewhat, and there was a shimmer of silver sunlight along the broad highway between the hedges. It was an auspicious omen—or at least their full hearts may have thought so; and then again there was a wedding chorus all around them from the birds—from the bright-eyed robin perched on the crimson bramble-spray, from the speckled thrush on the swaying elm, from the lark far-hovering over a field of young corn. But in their own happiness they had thought of others: Francie soon came back to Lionel again and his grievous misfortunes; and she was listening with meekness to this tall, clear-eyed man who could now claim a certain gentle authority over her. They were a long time before they got to the Doctor's house.

That same evening Miss Kate Burgoyne invited Lionel to come to her room for a cup of tea when he had dressed for the last act; and accordingly, when he was ready, he strolled along the corridor, rapped with his knuckles, and entered. It turned out that the prima donna had other visitors: a young lady whom he had never seen before, and Mr. Percival Miles. The young gentleman in faultless evening dress seemed a little surprised at the easy manner in which Lionel had lounged into the

place; and perhaps Lionel was also a little surprised—for this was Mr. Miles's first appearance in the room; but both men merely nodded to each other, in a formal acquaintance style, as they were in the habit of doing at the Garden Club. At the same moment Miss Burgoyne opened a portion of the curtain, so that she could address her guests.

"Mr. Moore, let me introduce you to my friend, Miss Ingram. Mr. Miles, I think you know."

And Lionel was glad enough to turn to the young lady and enter into conversation with her, for the pale young man with the slight yellow moustache was defiantly silent, and had even something fierce about his demeanour. It was no business of Lionel's to provoke a quarrel with this truculent fire-eater, especially in Miss Burgoyne's room. To quarrel about Kate Burgoyne?—the irony of events could go no further than that.

And of course, as the most immediate topic, they spoke of the gale that had been blowing across London all the afternoon and evening; for the southerly winds that had prevailed in the morning had freshened up and increased in violence until a veritable hurricane was now raging, threatening roofs, chimneys, and lamp-

posts, to say nothing of the whirled and driven and bewildered foot-passengers.

"I hear there has been a bad accident in Oxford Street," Lionel said to the young lady. "Some scaffolding has fallen—a lot of people hurt. I'm afraid there will be a sad tale to tell from the sea: even now, while we are secure in this big building, thinking only of amusement, I suppose there is many a ship labouring in the gale, or going headlong on to the rocks. Have you far to get home?" he asked.

"Oh, I am going home with Miss Burgoyne," the young lady answered.

But here Miss Burgoyne herself appeared, coming forth in the full splendour of *Grace Mainwaring's* bridal attire and with all her radiant witcheries of make-up; and the poor lad sitting there, who had never before been so near this vision of delight, seemed quite entranced by its (strictly speaking) superhuman loveliness. He could not take his eyes away from her. He did not think of joining in the conversation. He watched her at the mirror; he watched her making tea; he watched her munching a tiny piece of bread and butter (which was imprudent on her part, after the care she had bestowed on

her lips) and always he was silent and spell-bound. Miss Burgoyne, on the other hand, was talkative enough.

"Isn't it an awful night!" she exclaimed. "I thought the cab I came down in would be blown over. And they say it's getting worse and worse. I hear there has been a dreadful accident: some of the men were telling Jane about it: have you heard, Mr. Moore?—something about a scaffold. I suppose this theatre is safe enough; I don't feel any shaking. But I know I shall be so nervous going home to-night—I dread it already——"

"Miss Ingram says she is going home with you," Lionel pointed out carelessly.

"But that is worse!" the prima donna cried. "Two women are worse than one—they make each other nervous: no, what you want is a man's bluntness of perception—his indifference—and the sense of security you get from his being there. Two frightened women: how are they going to keep each other's courage up?"

It was clearly an invitation: almost a challenge. Lionel only said——

"Why, what have you to fear! The blowing over of a cab is about the last thing likely to happen. If you were walking along the pavement,

you might be struck by a falling slate; but you are out in the middle of the road. If you go home in a four-wheeled cab, you will be as safe as you are at this minute in this room."

She turned away from him; at the same moment the pale young gentleman said rather breathlessly—

"Miss Burgoyne, if you would permit me to accompany you and Miss Ingram home, I should esteem it a great honour—and—and pleasure."

She whipped round in an instant.

"Oh, thank you, Percy—Mr. Miles, I mean," she added, in pretty confusion. "That will be so kind of you. We shall be delighted, I'm sure—very kind of you indeed."

No more was said at the moment; for Miss Burgoyne had been called; and Lionel, as he wended his way to the wings, could only ask himself—

"What is she up to now? She calls me Mr. Moore before her friends, and him Percy; and she contrives to put him into the position of rescuing two distressed damsels. Well, what does it matter? I suppose women are like that."

But Mr. Percival Miles's accompanying those two young ladies through the storm did matter

to him, in another way, and seriously. When, the performance being over, he got into evening dress, and drove along in a hansom to the Garden Club, he found there two or three of the young gentlemen who were in the habit of lounging about the supper-room, glancing at illustrated papers, or chewing toothpicks, until the time for poker had arrived.

"Johnny," he said to one of them, "somehow I feel awfully down in the mouth to-night."

"That's unusual with you, then," was the cheerful reply. "For you are the pluckiest loser I ever saw. But I must say your luck of late has been just something frightful."

"Well, I'm down altogether—in luck, in finances, and spirits; and I'm going to pull myself up a peg. Come and keep me company. I'm going to order a magnum of Perrier Jouet of '74; and I only want a glass or two; you must help me out, or some of those other fellows."

"That's a pretty piece of extravagance!" the other exclaimed. "A magnum—to get a couple of glasses out of it: like an otter taking a single bite from a salmon's shoulder. Never mind, old chap: I'm in. I hate champagne at this time of night; but I don't want you to kill yourself."

As they sat at supper, with this big bottle before them, Lionel said—

“It will be a bad thing for me if young Miles doesn’t show up to-night.”

“I should have thought it would have been an excellent thing for you if Miles had never entered this club,” his companion observed.

“That’s true,” said Lionel, rather gloomily. “But my only chance now is to get some of my property back; and I can only get it back from him. You fellows are no use to me—not if I were winning all along the line.”

“Look here, Moore,” said the young man, in a more serious tone, “you may say it’s none of my business; but the way you and that fellow Miles have been going on is perfectly awful. If the Committee should hear about it, there will be a row, and no mistake!”

“My dear boy,” Lionel protested, as he pushed the unnecessary bottle to his neighbour, “the Committee have nothing to do with understandings that are settled outside the club. You don’t see Miles or me handing cheques for £200 or £300 across the table. How can the Committee expel you for holding up three fingers or nodding your head?”

"Well, then, you'll excuse me saying it, but he's a young ass, to gamble in that fashion," Johnny remarked, bluntly. "What fun does he get out of it? And it's quite a new thing with him—that's the odd business. I know a man who was at Merton with him; and certainly Miles got into a devil of a scrape—which cut short his career there; but it had nothing to do with gambling. He never was that way inclined at all; it's a new development, since he joined this club. Well, I suppose he can do what he likes. The heir to a baronetcy and such a place as Petmansworth can get just as much as he wants from the Jews."

"My good man, he doesn't need to go to the Jews," said Lionel, with grim irony.

"Where does he get all that money from? Do you think his father is fool enough to encourage him in such extravagance? I should hope not! At the same time I wish I had a father tarred with something of that same brush."

"Where does he get all the money from? So far he has got it from me," Lionel said, with a bit of a shrug. "He doesn't need to go to his father, or to the Jews either, when he can plunder me. And such a run of luck as he has had is simply astounding——"

"It isn't luck at all," the other interrupted. 'It's your play. You play too bold a game—too bold when you know he is going to play a bolder. Twice running he caught you last night bluffing on no hand at all; and I don't know what fabulous stakes were up—with your nods and signs. It's no use your trying to bluff that fellow. He won't be bluffed."

"The thing is as broad as it's long, man," Lionel said impatiently. "If he is determined to see me every time, he must be caught when I have a good hand—it stands to reason. The only thing is that my luck has been so confoundedly bad of late——"

"Yes; and when the luck's against you, you go betting on no hands at all—with Miles waiting for you!" his companion exclaimed. "All right: every man must play the game his own way. You don't seem to have found it profitable so far."

"Profitable!" Lionel said, with a dark look in his eyes. "I can tell you I am in a tight corner, and I reckoned on to-night to settle it one way or the other—not with you fellows; I can't get anything worth while out of you; but with Miles. And now he's gone away home with——"

He stopped in time: ladies' names are not men-

tioned in clubs—at least, not in such clubs as the Garden.

“The odd thing is,” continued Johnny, as he lit a cigarette, and definitely refused to have any more of the wine, “the extremely odd thing is that he doesn’t seem to care to win from the rest of us. He lets us share our modest little pots as if they weren’t worth looking at. It’s you he goes for, invariably.”

“And he’s gone for me to some purpose,” Lionel said, morosely. “I’m just about broke—broke five or six times over, if it comes to that—and by that pennyworth of yellow ribbon!”

“You needn’t call him names,” said Johnny, as he lay back in his chair. “Upon my soul I think Miles is somebody in disguise—a priest—an Inquisitor—somebody with a mission—to punish the sin of gambling. What does he care about the game? Nothing—I’ll swear it! He’s only watching for you. He’s an avenger. He has been sent by some superior power——”

“Then it must have been by the devil,” said Lionel, with a sombre expression, “for he has got the devil’s own luck at his back. Wait till I get four of a kind when he is betting on a full hand—and then you’ll see his corpse laid out!” This

was all he could say just then ; for here was the young man himself, who must have come back from the Edgware Road in a remarkably swift hansom.

Almost directly there was an adjournment to the card-room ; and the players took their places.

"I propose we have in the Joker,"* Lionel called aloud, as the cards were dealt for deal.

"I don't see the fun of it," objected the young man who had been Lionel's companion at the supper-table. "You never know where you are when the Joker is in. What do you say, Miles?"

"Oh, have it in by all means," Percival Miles said, with his eyes fixed on the table.

And perhaps it was that Lionel was anxious and nervous (for much depended on the results of this night's play), but he seemed to feel that the pale young man who sate opposite him appeared to be even more cold and implacable in manner than was usual with him. He began to have superstitious fears—like most gamblers. That was an uncanny suggestion his recent companion had put

* The Joker is a fifty-third card, of any kind of device, which is added to the pack : the player to whom it is dealt can make it any card he chooses. For example, if the other four cards he holds are two queens and two sevens, he can make the Joker card a third queen, and thus secure for himself a full hand.

into his head—that here was an avenger—a deputed instrument—an agent to inflict an awarded punishment. At the same time he tried to laugh at the notion. Punishment—from this stripling of a boy! It was a ludicrous idea, to be sure. When Lionel had in former days accepted his challenge to fight, it was with some kind of impatient resolve to teach him a wholesome lesson, and brush him aside. And he had regarded his running after Miss Burgoyne with a sort of good-natured toleration and contempt: there were always those young fools in the wake of actresses. But that he, Lionel, should be afraid of this young idiot? What was there to be afraid of? He was no swashbuckler—this pallid youth with the thin lips, who concentrated all his attention on the cards, and had no word or jest for his neighbours. How could there be anything baleful in the expression of eyes that were curiously expressionless? It was a pretty face (Lionel had at one time thought) but now it seemed capable of a good deal of relentless determination. Lionel had heard of people shivering when brought into contact with the repellent atmosphere that appeared to surround a particular person: but what was there deadly about this young man?

The game at first was not very exciting; though now and again the Joker played a merry trick, appearing in some unexpected place, and laying many a good hand low. Indeed it almost seemed as if Lionel had resolved to recoup himself by steady play; and so far there had been no duel between him and young Miles. That was not distant, however. On this occasion Lionel, who was seated on the left of the dealer—in other words, he being Age—when the cards were dealt found himself with two pairs in his hand, aces and queens. It was a pretty show. When the time came for him to declare his intention, he said—

“Well, I’m just going to make this another ten shillings to come in.”

That frightened no one; they all came in; what caused them to halt and reflect was that, on Lionel being subsequently asked how many cards he wished to have, he said—

“None, thank you.”

Not a syllable was uttered: there were surmises too occult for words. The player on Lionel’s left bet a humble two shillings. The next player simply came in. So did the third—who was Mr. Percival Miles. Likewise the dealer: in fact, they

were all prepared to pay that modest sum to inspect the Age's hand. But Lionel wanted a higher price for that privilege.

"I'm coming in with the little two shillings," said he, "and I will raise you a sovereign."

That promptly sent out the player on his left; his neighbour also retired. Not so the pallid young man with the thin lips.

"And one better," he said, depositing another sovereign.

The dealer incontinently fled. There only remained Lionel and his enemy; and the position of affairs was this—that while Lionel had taken no additional cards, and was presumably in possession of a straight or a flush (unless he was bluffing) Miles had taken one card, and most likely had got two pairs (unless he was finessing). Two pairs against two pairs, then? But Lionel had aces and queens.

"And five better," Lionel said, watching his enemy.

"And five better," said the younger man, stolidly.

And now the onlookers altered their surmises. No one but a lunatic would challenge a player who had declined to take supplementary cards unless he himself had an exceptionally strong hand, or

unless he was morally certain that his opponent was bluffing. Had Miles 'filled,' then, with his one card; and was a straight being played against a straight, or a flush against a flush? Or had the stolid young man started with fours? The subdued excitement with which this duel was now being regarded was enthralling; they forgot to protest against the wild raising of the bets; and when Lionel and his implacable foe, having exhausted all their money, had recourse to nods—merely marking their indebtedness to the pool on a bit of paper lying beside them—the others could only guess at the amount that was being played for. It was Lionel who gave in: clearly that insatiate bloodsucker was not to be shaken off.

"I call you."

"Three nines," was the answer—and Miles laid down on the table a pair of nines and the Joker. The other two were worthless: clearly, he had taken the one card as a blind.

"That is good enough—take away the money," Lionel said, calmly; and the younger man, with quite as expressionless a face, raked over the pile of gold, bank-notes, and counters.

There was a general sense of relief: that strain had been too intense.

"Very magnificent, you know," said the player who was next to Lionel, as he placed his ante on the table, "but it isn't poker. I think if you fix a limit you should stick to it. Have your private bets if you like; but let us have a limit that allows everybody to see the fun."

"Oh, certainly I agree to that," Lionel said at once. "We will keep to the sovereign limit; and Mr. Miles and I will understand well enough what we are betting when we happen to play against each other."

Thereafter the game went more quietly, though Lionel was clearly playing with absolute carelessness: no doubt his companions understood that he could not hope to retrieve his losses in this moderate play. He seemed tired, too, and dispirited: frequently he threw up his cards without drawing—which was unusual with him.

"Have a drink, old man, to wake you up," his neighbour said to him, about half-past two.

"No, thanks," he answered, listlessly looking on at the cards.

"A cigarette, then?"

"No, thanks. I think I must give up smoking altogether—my throat isn't quite right."

But an extraordinary stroke of good luck aroused

him. On looking at his cards he found he had been dealt four aces and a ten. Surely the hour of his revenge had sounded at last: for with such a hand he could easily frighten the others out, while he knew that Percival Miles would remain in, if he had anything at all. Accordingly, when it came to his turn he raised before the draw—raised the pool a sovereign; and this caused two of the players to retire, leaving himself, Miles and the dealer. He took one card—to his astonishment and concealed delight he found it was the Joker. Five aces!—surely on such a hand he might bet his furniture, his clothes, his last cigarette. Five aces!—it was nothing but brute force: all that was wanted was to pile on the money: he could well afford to be reckless this time. He saw that Miles also asked for one card, and that the dealer helped himself to two; but what they took was a matter of supreme indifference to him.

It was Percival Miles's turn to bet.

"I will bet a sovereign," said he.

"And I'll stay in with you," remarked the dealer, depositing the golden coin.

"One better," said Lionel.

"And one better," said Miles.

Here the dealer retired; so that these two were left in as before—well, not as before, for Lionel had five aces in his hand! And now they made no pretence of keeping to the limit that had been imposed; their bets were registered on the bit of paper which each had by him; and pertinaciously did these two gladiators hack and slash at each other. Lionel was quite reckless. His enemy had taken one card. Very well. Supposing he had “filled” a flush or a straight, so much the better. Supposing he also had got fours—that, too, was excellent well; for he could have nothing higher than four kings. Strictly speaking, there was only one hand that could beat Lionel’s—a straight flush; but then a straight flush is an uncommonly rare thing; and besides, the appearance of five aces in one’s hand seems to convey a sense of quite unlimited power. That five aces are technically * no better than four aces does not strike the possessor of them; he regards the goodly show—and strives to conceal his elation.

But even the onlookers, intensely interested as

* Technically this is so; but practically the holder of the five aces has the advantage of knowing that his opponent cannot have the Joker.

they were in this fell combat, began to grow afraid when they guessed at the sum that was now in the imaginary pool. The story might get about the club; the Committee might shut up the card-room; there might be a talk of expulsion. As for Lionel, he kept saying to himself, "Well, this is a safe thing; and I could go on all night; but I won't take a brutal advantage. As soon as I think I have got back about what this young fellow has already taken from me since he came into the club, I will stop. I don't want to break him. I don't want to send him to the money-lenders."

As for the pale young man across the table, his demeanour was that of a perfect poker-player. The only thing that could be noticed was a slight contraction of his pupils, as if he were concentrating his eyes on the things immediately around him, and trying to leave his face quite inscrutable. There was no eagerness in his betting—nor was there any affected resignation; it was entirely mechanical; like clockwork came the raised and raised bet.

"I call you," said Lionel at last, amid a breathless silence.

Without a word Percival Miles laid his cards on the table, arranging them in sequence: they were

five, six, seven, eight, and nine of clubs—not an imposing hand, certainly, but Lionel knew his doom was sealed. He rose from his chair, with a brief laugh that did not sound very natural.

“I think I know when I’ve had enough,” he said. “Good-night!” And “Good-night!” came from one and all of them—though there was an ominous pause until the door was shut behind him.

He went down below, to the supper-room, which was all deserted now; he drew in a chair to a small writing-table, and took a sheet of note-paper. On it he scrawled, with rather a feverish hand—

“As I understand it, I owe you £800 on this evening, with £300 from yesterday—£1,100 in all. I will try to let you have it to-morrow. L. M.”—and that he put in an envelope, which he addressed to ‘Percival Miles, Esq.,’ and sent up-stairs by one of the servants. Then he went and got his coat and hat, and left. It was raining hard, and there was a blustering wind; but he called no hansom; the wet and cold seemed grateful to him, for he was hot and excited. And then, somewhat blindly, and bare-throated, he passed through the streaming thoroughfares—caring little how long it took him to reach Piccadilly.

CHAPTER VI.

A MEMORABLE DAY.

“ . . . But do you know, dear Maurice, that you propose marrying a beggar ; and more than that, a most unabashed beggar, as you will be saying to yourself presently ? The fact is, immediately after you left this afternoon, the post brought me a letter from Sister Alexandra, who tells me that two of her small children, suffering from hip-disease, must be sent home, for the doctors say they are getting no better, and the beds in the ward are wanted. They are not fit to be sent home, she writes ; then all the Country Holiday money collected last summer has been spent ; and what is she to do ? Well, I have told her to send them on to me, and I shall take my chance of finding the 5*l.* that will be necessary : the fact is, I happen to know one of the poor little things—Grace Wilson her name is, the dearest little mite. But the truth

is, dear Maurice, I haven't a penny; for I have overdrawn the small allowance that comes to me quarterly, and spent it all. Now don't be vexed that I ask you, *so soon*, for a little help; a sovereign will do, if Linn will give another; and Linn has always been very good to me in this way, though for some time back I have been ashamed to take anything from him. The Doctor grumbles, but gives me five shillings whenever I ask him; Auntie will give me the same; and the rest I can get from our friends and acquaintances about here. Don't be impatient with me, dear Maurice; and some day I will take you down to Whitechapel and show you the very prettiest sight in the whole world—and that is Sister Alexandra with her fifty children. . . .”

Maurice Mangan read this passage as he was driving in a hansom along Pall Mall, on his way to call on Lionel. The previous portion of the letter, which more intimately concerned herself and himself, he had read several times over before coming out, studying every phrase of it as if it were an individual treasure, and trying to listen for the sound of her voice in every sentence. And as for this more practical matter, why, although he was rather a poor man, he thought he was not

going to allow Francie to wander about in search of grudging shillings and half-crowns so long as he himself could come to her aid ; so at the foot of St. James's Street, he stopped the hansom, went into the telegraph-office, and sent off the following message : " Five pounds will reach you to-morrow morning. You cannot refuse my first gift in our new relationship. Maurice." And thereafter he went on to Piccadilly—feeling richer, indeed, rather than poorer.

When he rang the bell at Lionel's lodgings, it was with no very clear idea of the message or counsel he was bringing with him ; but the news he now received put all these things out of his head. The house-porter appeared, looking somewhat concerned.

" Yes, sir, Mr. Moore is up-stairs ; but I'm afraid he's very unwell."

" What is the matter ? " Maurice asked instantly.

" He must have got wet coming home last night, sir ; and he has caught a bad cold. I've just been for Dr. Whitsen ; and he will be here at twelve."

" But Dr. Whitsen is a throat doctor—— "

" Yes, sir ; but it is always his throat Mr. Moore is most anxious about ; and when he found himself

husky this morning, he would take nothing but a raw egg beaten up, and a little port wine negus ; and now he won't speak—he will only write on a piece of paper. He is saving himself for the theatre to-night, sir, I think that is it ; but would you like to go up and see him ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I will go up and see him,” Mangan said ; and without more ado he ascended the stairs and made his way into Lionel's bedroom.

He found his friend under a perfect mountain of clothes that had been heaped upon him ; and certainly he was not shivering now—on the contrary, his face was flushed and hot, and his eyes singularly bright and restless. As soon as Lionel saw who this new comer was, he made a sign that a block of paper and a pencil lying on the table should be brought to him ; and turning slightly, he put the paper on the pillow and wrote——

“ I'm nursing my voice—hope to be all right by night—are you busy to-day, Maurice ? ”

“ No—there is no House on Saturday,” Maurice made answer.

“ I wish you would stay by me,” Lionel wrote—with rather a shaky hand. “ I'm in dreadful trouble. I undertook to pay Percival Miles 1,100*l.* and Lord Rockminster 300*l.* to-day without fail ;

and I haven't a farthing ; and don't know where to send or what to do."

" Oh, never mind about money ! " Maurice said, almost impatiently—for there was something about the young man's appearance he did not at all like. " Why should you worry about that ? The important business is for you to get well——"

" I tell you I *MUST* pay Rockminster to-day," the trembling pencil scrawled. " He was the only one of them who stood my friend. I tell you I *MUST* pay him—if I have to get up and go out and seek for the money myself——"

" Nonsense ! " Mangan exclaimed. " What do people care about a day or two, when they hear you are ill ? However, you needn't worry, Linn. As for that other sum you mention, well, that is beyond me—I couldn't lay my hands on it at once—but as for the £300, I will lend you that—so set your mind at rest on that point."

" And you'll give it into Lord Rockminster's own hands—*this day ?* "

" Surely it will be quite the same if I send the cheque by a commissionaire : he must get it sooner or later."

The earnest, restless eyes looked strangely supplicating.

"Into his own hands, Maurice!"

"Very well—very well," Mangan had just time to say—for here was the doctor.

Dr. Whitsen examined his patient with the customary professional calm and reticence; asked a few questions—which Lionel answered with such husky voice as was left him; and then he said—

"Yes, you have caught a severe chill, and your system is feverish generally: the throat is distinctly congested——"

"But to-night, doctor—the theatre—to-night!" Lionel broke in, excitedly. "Surely by eight o'clock——"

"Oh, quite impossible: not to be thought of," the doctor responded with decision.

"Why can't you do something to tide me over—for the one night?" the young man said, with appealing and almost pathetic eyes. "I've never disappointed the public once before—never once. And if I could only get over to-night, there's the long rest to-morrow and Monday——"

"Come, come," said the doctor, soothingly, "you must not excite yourself about a mere trifle. You know it is no uncommon thing; and the public don't resent it; they would be most unreasonable if they did. Singers are but mortal,

like themselves. No, no, you must put that out of your mind altogether."

Lionel turned to Maurice.

"Maurice," he said, in that husky voice, and yet with a curious subdued eagerness, "telegraph to Lehmann at once—at once. Doyle is all right; he has sung the part often enough. And will you send a note to Doyle—he can go into my dressing-room and take any of my things he wants: Lingard has the keys. And a telegram to mother—in case she should see something in the newspapers: tell her there is nothing the matter—only a trifling cold——"

"Really, Mr. Moore," said the doctor, interposing, "you must have a little care; you must calm yourself; I am sure your friend will attend to all these matters for you; but in the meantime you must exercise the greatest self-control, or you may do your throat some serious injury. Why should you be disturbed by so common an incident in professional life? Your substitute will do well enough; and the public will greet you with all the greater favour on your return."

"It never happened before," the young man said, in lower tones. "I never—had to give in before——"

"Now tell me," Dr. Whitsen continued. "Dr. Ballardyce is your usual medical attendant, is he not?"

"I know him very well; he is an old friend of mine; but I've never had occasion to trouble him much," was the answer, given with some greater care and reserve.

"I will call on him as I go by; and if possible we will come down together in the afternoon," the doctor said; and then Maurice fetched him writing materials from the other room, and he sate down at the little table. Before he went, he gave some general directions; then the two friends were left alone.

Lionel took up the pencil again, and turned to the block of paper.

"The 300^l., Maurice," his trembling fingers scrawled, showing how his mind was still torturing itself with these obligations.

"Oh, that's all right," Maurice answered lightly. "You give me Lord Rockminster's address, and I'll take the cheque to him myself as soon as the doctors have been here in the afternoon. Don't you worry about that, Linn, or about anything; for you know you mustn't increase that feverishness, or we shall have you a right-down *bonâ-fide*

patient on our hands ; and then when will you get back to the theatre again ? I am going out now to telegraph to Lehmann. But I don't think I need alarm the Winstead people ; you see, they don't read the Sunday papers ; and, indeed, if I send a note now to Francie, she will get it the first thing in the morning. Linn," he continued, after a moment's hesitation, "are you too much upset by your own affairs to listen to a bit of news ? I came with the intention of telling you ; but perhaps I'd better wait until you get over these present troubles——"

Lionel looked at him with those bright, restless eyes for a second or two, as if to gather something from his expression ; and then he wrote—

"Is it about Francie ?"

Maurice nodded : it was enough. Lionel stretched out his hot hand, and took that of his companion.

"I am glad," he said in a low voice. And then, after a moment or two's thinking, he turned to his writing again : "Well, it *is* hard, Maurice. I have been looking forward to this for many a day, and have been wondering how I should congratulate you both. And I get the news now—when I'm ruined. I haven't enough money even to buy a wedding-present for Francie !"

“Do you think she will mind that?” Mangan said, cheerfully. “But I’m going to send her your good wishes, Linn—now, when I write. And look here, if she should come up to see you—or your father and mother—for it is quite possible the doctors may insist on your giving your voice a rest for a considerable while—well, if they should come up from Winstead, mind you say nothing about your monetary troubles. They needn’t be mentioned to anybody; nor need they worry you; I dare say I shall be able to get something more done. Only, if the Winstead people should come up, don’t you say anything to them about these monetary affairs, or connect me with them; for it might put me into an awkward position—you understand?”

And the last words Lionel wrote on the block of paper before Mangan went out to execute his various commissions were these—

“You are a good friend, Maurice.”

When the doctors arrived in the afternoon, Mangan had come back. They found Lionel complaining of acute headache and a burning thirst; his skin hot and dry: pulse full and quick; also he seemed drowsy and heavy, though his eyes retained their restless brightness. There could be

no doubt, as they privately informed Maurice, he was in the first stages of a violent fever; and the best thing that could be done was to get in a professional nurse at once. Yes, Mr. Mangan might communicate with his friends; his father, being himself a doctor, would judge whether it was worth while coming up just then; but of course it would be inadvisable to have a lot of relations crowding the sick-room. Obviously the immediate cause of the fever was the chill caught on the previous night; but there might have been predisposing causes; and everything calculated to excite the mind unduly was to be kept away from him. As for the throat, there were no dangerous symptoms as yet; the simple congestion would probably disappear, when the fever abated, with a return to health; but the people at the theatre might as well know that it would be a long time before Mr. Moore could return to his duties. Dr. Ballardyce would see at once about having a professional nurse sent: meanwhile, quiet, rest, and the absence of mental disturbance were the great things. And so the two augurs departed.

The moment that Mangan returned to Lionel's room, the latter glanced at him quickly and furtively.

"Are they gone, Maurice?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"And the cheque—for Lord Rockminster?"

"There it is, already drawn out," was the answer, as the slip of lilac paper was unfolded.

"But I can't take it to him until the nurse comes—certainly not."

"She may be an hour, Maurice," Lionel said restlessly. "I don't want anybody to wait on me. If you think it necessary, call up Mrs. Jenkins, and she can sit in the next room: the bell here is enough. Oh, my head!—my head!"—and he turned away wearily.

Maurice saw well enough that he would never rest until this money was paid; so he called up the house-porter's wife, and gave her some instructions; and forthwith set off for the address in Palace Gardens Terrace which Lionel had given him. When he arrived there, he was informed that his lordship was not at home. He pressed his inquiries; he said his business was of the utmost importance; and at last he elicited, after considerable waiting, that though no one in the house could say whither Lord Rockminster had gone, it was understood that he was dining at the Universities Club that evening. With this infor-

mation Mangan returned to Piccadilly. He found the nurse already arrived, and installed. He pacified Lionel with the news; for, if he went along to the Universities Club at half-past eight, he must surely be able to place the money in Lord Rockminster's own hands.

"Maurice, you're awfully kind," his friend murmured. "And you've had nothing to eat all day. Tell Mrs. Jenkins to get you something——"

"Oh, that's all right," Mangan said, carelessly. "I'll just scribble a line to Francie, to tell her what the doctors have said; and I'll take that down to the post myself. Then I'll get something to eat; and come back here; and at half-past eight I'm going along to Pall Mall, where I'm certain to catch Lord Rockminster—so that it's all quite right and straight, you see."

But as it chanced, when he went along to the Universities that evening, he found he had missed his man—by only a minute or two. He was surprised and troubled; he knew how Lionel would fret. The hall-porter did not know whither Lord Rockminster had gone: that is to say, he almost certainly did know, but it was not his business to tell. Luckily, at this same moment, there was a

young fellow leaving the club, and, as he was lighting his cigar, he heard Maurice's inquiries—and perhaps was rather struck by his appearance, which was certainly not that of a sheriff's officer.

“I think I can tell you where they have gone, sir,” said the young man, good-naturedly. “Some of them had an early dinner to-night, to go up to the billiard-handicap at the Palm-Tree: I fancy Lord Rockminster was of the party, and that you will find him there.”

This information proved correct. Mangan went up to the Palm-Tree Club in St. James's Street; and sent in his card. Almost directly he was invited to step up-stairs to the billiard-room. Just as he entered the door, he saw Lord Rockminster leave the raised bench where he had been seated by the side of a very artificial-looking palm-tree stem, and the next moment the two men were face-to-face.

“How do you do, Mr. Mangan?” Lord Rockminster said, in his usual impassive way. “You remember I had the pleasure of meeting you at my sister's. What is the matter with your friend Mr. Moore?—I see by the evening paper he is not to appear to-night.”

“He is far from well—a chill followed by a

fever," Mangan answered. "I have just come from him, with a message for you."

"Oh, really," said the young nobleman. "Ah, I dare say I know; but I assure you it is quite unnecessary. Tell him not to mind. When a fellow's ill, why should he be troubled?"

Maurice had taken out his pocket-book, and was searching for the lilac slip.

"But here is the cheque, Lord Rockminster; and nothing would do him but that I must give it into your own hands."

"Oh, really."

Lord Rockminster took the cheque, and happened to glance at it.

"Ah, I see this is drawn out by yourself, Mr. Mangan," he said. "I presume—eh—that you have lent Mr. Moore the money."

Maurice hesitated; but there was no prevarication handy.

"If you ask the question, it is so. However, I suppose it is all the same."

"All the same?—yes," Lord Rockminster said slowly; "with only this difference, that before he owed me the money, and now he owes it to you. I don't see any necessity for that arrangement. I haven't asked him for it; I shan't ask him for

it until he is quite ready and able to pay: why, therefore, should he borrow from you? Take back your cheque, Mr. Mangan; I understand what you were willing to do for your friend; I assure you it is quite uncalled for."

But Maurice refused. He explained all the circumstances of the case—Lionel's feverish condition, his fretting about the debt, the necessity for keeping his mind pacified, and so on; and at last Lord Rockminster said—

"Very well; you can tell him you have given me the cheque. At the same time you can't compel me to pay it into my bankers; and I don't see why I should take £300 of your money when you don't owe me any. When Mr. Moore gets perfectly well again, you can tell him he still owes me £300—and he can take his own time about paying it." And with that Maurice took his leave, Lord Rockminster going down the stair with him and out to the hall-door, where he bade him good-bye.

When he returned to Piccadilly, he said to the nurse—

"I suppose you can sleep at a moment's notice?"

"Pretty well, sir," she answered, with a demure professional smile.

"Then you'd better find out this room that Mrs.

Jenkins has got for you, and lie down for a few hours. I shan't be leaving until after midnight—perhaps one or two o'clock. Then, when I go, you can have this sofa here; and I shall be back early in the morning, to give you another rest."

"Thank you, sir."

He went into the adjoining room.

"Headache any better, Linn, my boy?" he asked, stooping over the bed.

There was no answer for a second or two: then the eyes were opened, showing a drowsy, pained expression.

"Did you see him, Maurice?"

"Oh, yes, that's all settled," Mangan said, cheerfully. "I can't say there is much of the grasping creditor about your friend. I could hardly persuade him to take the cheque at all—after I had hunted him from place to place. What made you so desperately punctilious, Linn? You don't imagine he would have talked about it to any women-folk, even supposing you had not paid up? Is that it? No, no, you can't imagine he would do anything of that kind: I should call him a thoroughly good fellow, if one might be so familiar with our betters. However, I don't want you to say anything; you mustn't speak; I'm

going to talk to you." He drew in a chair to the bedside, and sate down. "Now I wish you to understand. You've got a mortal bad cold, which may develop into a fever; and you have a slightly congested throat; altogether you must consider yourself an invalid, old man; and it may be some time before you can get back to the theatre. Now the first thing for you is peace of mind; you're not to worry about anything; you've got to dismiss every possible care and vexation."

"It's all you know, Maurice," the sick man said, with a wearied sigh.

"Oh, I know more than you think. We'll just take one thing at a time. About this £1100, for example. You are aware I am not, strictly speaking, a Croesus, yet I have made my little economies, and they are tied up in one or two fairly safe things. Well, now—— Oh, be quiet, Linn, and let me have it out! Something happened to me yesterday that more than ever convinced me of the worthlessness of riches. You know the coppice that goes up from Winstead Station. At the further end there is a gate. At that gate yesterday I heard a dozen words—twenty or thirty, perhaps—that were of more value to me than Pactolus in full flood or all the money heaped

up in Aladdin's cave. And now I am so puffed up with joy and pride that I am going still further to despise my wealth—my hoards and vast accumulations; and on Monday, if I can, I am going to get you that 1,100*l.*, just as sure as ever was——”

“Maurice—you have to think of Francie,” Lionel said, in his husky low voice. And here Mangan paused for a second or two.

“Well,” said he, more thoughtfully, “what happened yesterday certainly involves responsibilities; but these haven't been assumed yet; and the nearest duty is the one to be considered. I don't know whether I shall tell Francie; I may, or I may not; but I am certain that if I do she will approve—certain as that I am alive.”

“I won't rob Francie,” said Lionel, with a little moan of weariness or pain.

“You can't rob her of what she hasn't got,” Mangan said, promptly. “I know this, that if Francie knew you were in these straits, and worrying about it, she would instantly come up and offer you her own little money—which is not a very large fortune, as I understand: and I also know that you would refuse it.”

“A dose of prussic acid, first,” Lionel murmured, to himself.

“Prussic acid!—Bosh!” said Maurice. “What is the use of talking rubbish! Well, I’m not going to let you talk at all. I’m going to read you the news out of the evening papers, until you go to sleep.”

When Dr. Ballardyce called next morning, he found that the fever had gained apace; all the symptoms were aggravated—the temperature, in especial, had seriously increased. The sick man lay drowsily indifferent, now and again moaning slightly; but sometimes he would waken up, and then there was a curiously anxious and restless look in his eyes. The nurse said she was afraid he had not been asleep at all, though occasionally he had appeared to be asleep. When the doctor left again, she was sent to bed, and Maurice Mangan took her place in the sitting-room.

That was an extraordinary Sunday, long to be remembered. Anything more hopelessly dismal than the outlook from these Piccadilly windows it was impossible to imagine. The gale of Friday had blown itself out in rain; and that had been followed by stagnant weather and a continuous drizzle; so that the trees in the Green Park opposite looked like black phantoms in the vague grey mist; while everything seemed wet and clammy and cold. Maurice paced up and down

the room, his feet shod in noiseless slippers ; or he gazed out on that melancholy spectacle until he thought of suicide ; or again he would go into the adjoining apartment, to see how his friend was getting on, or whether he wanted anything. But as the day wore on, matters became a little brisker ; for there were numerous callers, and some of them waited to have a special message sent down to them ; while others, knowing Mangan, and learning that he was in charge of the invalid, came up to have a word with himself. Baskets of flowers began to arrive, too ; and these, of course, must have come from private conservatories. No one was allowed to enter the sick-room ; but Maurice carried thither the news of all this kindly remembrance and sympathy, as something that might be grateful to his patient.

“You’ve got a tremendous number of friends, Linn, and no mistake,” he said. “Many a great statesman or poet might envy you.”

“I suppose it is in the papers ?” Lionel asked, without raising his head.

“In one or two of the late editions last evening, and in most of to-day’s papers ; but to-morrow it will be all over the country—I have had several London correspondents here this afternoon.”

"All over the country?" Lionel repeated absently; and then he lay still for a second or two. "No use—no use!" he moaned in so low a voice that Mangan could hardly hear. And then again he looked up wearily.

"Come here, Maurice. I want to—to ask you something. If—if I were to die—do you think—they would put it in any of the papers abroad?"

"Nonsense—what are you talking about!" Maurice exclaimed, in a simulated anger. "Talking of dying—because you've got a feverish cold: that's not like you, Linn! You're not going to frighten your people when they come up from Winstead, by talking like that?"

"Don't let them come up," was all he said; and shut his eyes again.

Among the callers that afternoon who, learning that Mr. Mangan was upstairs, came personally to make enquiries, was Miss Burgoyne, who was accompanied by her brother.

"What is the matter?" she said, briefly, to Maurice. "One never can trust what is in the newspapers."

He told her.

"Serious?"

"That depends," he said, in a low voice, as they

stood together at the window. "I hope not. But I suppose the fever will have to run its course."

"It will be some time before he can be back at the theatre?"

"It will be a very long time. There is some slight congestion of the throat as well. When he pulls through with the fever, he will most likely be sent abroad, for rest to his throat."

She considered for a second or two; then she said, with a matter-of-fact air—

"They needn't make a fuss about that. His throat will be all right. It is only repeated congestions that seriously affect the membrane; and he has been exceptionally lucky—or exceptionally strong, perhaps. Who is his doctor?"

"Dr. Ballardyce."

"Don't know him."

"Then there's Dr. Whitsen."

"Oh, *that's* all right—he'll do. It's the voice that's the important thing: the general system must take its chance. Well, tell him I'm very sorry I suppose there's nothing one can send him?"

"Thank you, I don't think there is anything. Look at the flowers and grapes and things there—already—and this is Sunday."

She glanced at those gifts with open disdain.

“Very easy for rich folks to show their sympathy by sending an order to their head-gardener!”

“I will tell him that you called, and left kind messages for him.”

“Yes, tell him that. And tell him Doyle does very well—quite well enough—though he’s as nervous as a pantomime-girl hoisted in a transformation-scene. If I were you,” continued this extremely practical young lady, “I wouldn’t let any of the newspaper men know that it may be a considerable time before Mr. Moore is back. Nobody likes to lose touch of the public more than he can help, you understand; and if they’re always expecting you back, that’s something. Good-bye!”

Maurice accompanied her downstairs and to the door; then he returned to the sitting-room, and to his private meditations. For this brief interview had been of the keenest interest to him; he had studied every expression of her face, listened to every intonation of her voice: almost forced, in spite of himself, to admire her magnificent nerve. But now, of course, in recalling all these things, he was thinking of Francie; as a man invariably does when he places the one woman of the world on a pedestal, that all the rest of her sex may be compared with her; and even his extorted admira-

tion of the prima donna's coolness, and self-possession, and business-like tact, did not prevent his rejoicing at the thought that Francie and Miss Burgoyne were poles asunder.

That evening Maurice was startled. He had gone very quietly into the sick-room, just to see how his patient was getting on; and found him breathing heavily, and also restlessly muttering to himself. Perhaps even the slight noise of his entrance had attracted the notice of one abnormally sensitive; at all events, Lionel opened his eyes, which were no longer drowsy but eager and excited, and said—

“Maurice, have you not sent for Nina yet?”

“For Nina?”

“Oh, yes, yes,” Lionel went on, as quickly as his labouring breath would allow. “How can I go abroad without saying good-bye to Nina? Tell Jenkins to go down to Sloane-street at once—at once, Maurice—before she leaves for the theatre. I have been waiting for her all day—I heard the people coming up—one after another—but not Nina. And I cannot go without saying good-bye. I want to tell her something. She must make friends with Miss Burgoyne, now she has got into the theatre. Lehmann will give her a better part

by-and-bye—oh, yes, I'll see to that for Nina—and I must write to Pandiani, to tell him of her success—”

“Oh, but that's all settled, Linn,” his friend broke in, perceiving the situation at once. “Now you just keep quiet; and it will be all perfectly arranged—perfectly. Of course I know you are glad your old friend and companion has got a place in the theatre.”

“Yes, she was my friend—she was my friend once,” he said, and he looked appealingly to Maurice; “but—but I sometimes think—sometimes it is my head—that there is something wrong. Can you tell me, Maurice? There is something—I don't know what—but it troubles me—I cannot tell what it is. When she was here to-day, she would not speak to me. She came and looked. She stood by the door there. She had on the black dress and the crimson bonnet—but she had forgotten her music—I thought perhaps she was going down to the theatre—but why wouldn't she speak to me, Maurice?—she did not look angry—she looked like—like—oh, just like Nina—and I could not ask her why she would not say anything—my throat was so bad—”

“Yes, I know that, Linn,” Maurice said, gently,

“and that is why you mustn’t talk any more now. You must lie still and rest, so that you may take your place in the theatre again——”

“But haven’t they told you I am never going to the theatre again?” he said, eagerly. “Oh, no; as soon as I can I am going away abroad—I am going away all over the world—to find some one. You said she was my friend and my good comrade—do you think I could let her be away in some distant place, and all alone—I could not rest in my grave! It may be Malta—or Cairo—or Australia—or San Francisco—but that is what I am set on—I have thought of it so long that—that I think my head has got tired—and my heart a little bit broken, as they say—only I never believed in that: never mind, Maurice, I am going away to find Nina—ah, that will be a surprise some day—a surprise just as when she first came here—into the room—in the black dress and the crimson bonnet—*la cianciosella*, she was going away again!—she was always so proud and easily offended—always the *cianciosella*!”

He turned a little, and moaned, and lay still; and Maurice, fearing that his presence would only add to this delirious excitement, was about to slip from the room, when his sick friend called him back.

“Maurice, don't forget this now! When she comes again, you must stand by her at the door there, and tell her not to be frightened: I am not so very ill. Tell Nina not to be frightened. She used not to be frightened. Ask her to remember the afternoons when I had the broken ankle—she and Sabetta Debernardi used to come nearly every day—and Sabetta brought her zither—and Nina and I played dominoes. Maurice, you never heard Nina sing to herself—just to herself, not thinking—and sometimes Sabetta would play a barcarola—oh, there was one that Nina used to sing sometimes—*Da la parte de Castelo—ziraremo mio tesoro—mio tesoro!*—*la passara el Bucintoro—per condur el Dose in mar*—I heard it last night again—but—but all stringed instruments—and the sound of wind and waves—it was so strange and terrible—when I was listening for Nina's voice. I think it was at Capri—along the shores—but it was nighttime—and I could not hear Nina because of the wind and the waves. Oh, it was terrible, Maurice. The sea was roaring all round the shores—and it was so black—only I thought if the water was about to come up and drown me, it might—it might take me away somewhere—I don't know where—perhaps to the place where Nina's ship

went down, in the dark. Why did she go away, Maurice!—why did she go away from us all!—the poor *cianciosella*!”

These rambling, wearied, broken utterances were suddenly arrested: there was a tapping at the outer door—and Lionel turned frightened, anxious eyes on his friend.

“I’ll go and see who it is,” Mangan said, quietly. “Meanwhile you must lie perfectly quiet and still, Linn, and be sure that everything will come right.”

In the next room, at the open door, he found the reporter of a daily newspaper which was in the habit of devoting a column every Monday morning to music and musicians. He was bidden to enter. He said he wished to have the last authentic news of the condition of the popular young baritone, for of course there would be some talk, especially in ‘the profession,’ about Mr. Moore’s non-appearance on the preceding night.

“Well,” said Maurice, in an undertone, “don’t publish anything alarming, you know, for he has friends and relatives who are naturally anxious. The fever has increased somewhat; that is the usual thing; a nervous fever must run its course. And to-night he has been slightly delirious——”

"Oh, delirious?" said the reporter, with a quick look.

"Slightly—slightly—just wandering a little in his feverishness. I wouldn't make much of it. The public don't care for medical details. When the crisis of the fever comes, there will be something more definite to mention."

"If all goes well, when do you expect he will be able to return to the New Theatre?"

"That," said Maurice, remembering Miss Burgoyne's hint, "it is quite impossible to say."

"Thanks," said the reporter. "Good-night!" And therewith Mangan returned to the sick-room.

He found that Lionel had forgotten all about having been startled into silence by the tapping at the outer door. His heated brain was busy with other bewildering possibilities now.

"Maurice—Maurice!" he said eagerly. "It is near the time—quick, quick!—get me the box—behind the music—on the piano——"

"Look here, Linn," said his friend, with some affectation of roughness, "you must really calm yourself, and be silent, or I shall have to go and sit in the other room. You are straining your throat every time you speak, and exciting yourself as well."

"Ah, and it is my last chance!" Lionel said, piteously, and with burning eyes. "If you only knew, Maurice, you would not refuse!"

"Well, tell me quietly what you want," Mangan said.

"The box—on the top of the piano," Lionel made answer, in a low voice, but his eyes were tremblingly anxious. "Quick, Maurice!"

Mangan went and without any difficulty found the box that held Nina's trinkets and returned with it.

"Open it!" Lionel said, clearly striving to conceal his excitement. "Yes, yes—put these other things aside—yes, that is it—the two cups—take them separate: it isn't twelve yet, is it? No, no; there will be time; now put them on the table by the window there—yes, that is it—now pour some wine into them—never mind what, Maurice, only be quick!"

Well, he could not refuse this appeal; he thought that most likely the yielding to these incoherent wishes would prove the best means of pacifying the fevered mind; so he went into the next room, and brought back some wine, and half-filled the two tiny goblets.

"Now, wait, Maurice," Lionel said, slowly, and

in a still lower voice, though his eyes were afire. "Wait and watch—closely, closely—don't breathe or speak. It is near twelve. Watch. Do not take your eyes off them; and at twelve o'clock, when you see one of the cups move, then you must seize it—seize it, and seize Nina's hand!—and hold her fast! Oh, I can tell you she will not leave us any more—not when I have spoken to her and told her how cruel it was of her to go away. I do not know where she is now; but at twelve, all of a sudden, there will be a kind of trembling of the air—that is Nina—for she has been here before: how long to twelve now, Maurice?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, it is a long time till twelve yet," his friend said. "I think, if I were you, I would try to sleep for an hour or two; and I'll go into the other room so as not to disturb you."

"No, no, Maurice," Lionel said, with panting vehemence. "You must not stir! It is quite near, I tell you—it is close on twelve—watch the cups, Maurice, and be ready to spring up and seize her hand and hold her fast. Quite near twelve . . . surely I hear something . . . is it something outside the window . . . like stringed instruments . . . and waves, dark waves . . . no,

no! Maurice, Maurice! it is in the next room!—it is some one sobbing!—it is Nina!—Nina!”

He uttered a loud shriek, and struggled wildly to raise himself; but Maurice, with gentle pressure and persuasive words, got him to lie still.

“It is past twelve now, Linn; and you see there has been nothing. We must wait; and some day we will find out all about Nina for you. Of course you would like to know about your old companion. Oh, we’ll find her, rest assured!”

Lionel had turned away, and was lying moaning and muttering to himself. The only phrase his companion could make out was something about “a wide, wide sea . . . and all dark.”

But Maurice, finding him now comparatively quiet, stealthily put back the various trinkets into the box and carried it into the other room. And then, hearing no further sound, he remained there—remained until the nurse came down to take his place.

He told her what had occurred; but she was familiar with these things; and doubtless knew much better than himself how to deal with such emergencies. At the street-door he paused to light his pipe—his first smoke that day, and surely well-earned. Then he went away through the dark

thoroughfares down to Westminster, not without much pity and sadness in his mind, also perhaps with some curious speculations—as to the lot of poor luckless mortals, their errors and redeeming virtues, and the vagrant and cruel buffetings of fate.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

On the Monday morning matters were so serious that Mangan telegraphed down to Winstead ; but the old Doctor and his wife, and Francie, were already on their way to town. When they arrived in Piccadilly, and went into the sick-room, Lionel did not know them : most likely he merely confused them with the crowding phantoms of his brain. He was now in a high state of fever ; but the delirium was not violent ; he lay murmuring and moaning, and it was only chance phrases they could catch—about some one being lost—and a wide and dark sea—and so forth. Sometimes he fancied that Nina was standing at the door ; and he would appeal piteously to her ; and then sink back with a sigh, as if convinced once more that it was only a vision. The Winstead people took apartments for themselves at a hotel in Half-Moon Street ; but

of course they spent nearly all their time in this sitting-room, where they could do little but listen to the reports of the doctors, and wait, and hope.

In the afternoon Mangan said—

“Francie, you’re not used to sitting in-doors all day: won’t you come out for a little stroll in the Park over there?”

“And I’m sure you want a breath of fresh air as much as any one, Mr. Mangan,” the old lady said. “What would my boy have done without you all this time!”

Francie at once and obediently put on her things, and she and Maurice went down-stairs and crossed the street and entered the Park, where they could walk up and down the unfrequented ways, and talk as they pleased.

“I suppose you will be going down to the House of Commons almost directly?” she asked.

“Oh, no,” he answered. “I’ve begged off. I could not think of getting to work while Linn is so ill as that.”

“Do you know what I have been thinking all day, Maurice?” she said, gently. “When I saw you with the doctors, and when I heard of all you have done since Saturday morning—well, I could not help thinking that there must be something

fine about Lionel to have secured him such a friend."

He looked at her with some surprise.

"But you have been his friend—all these years!" he said.

"Ah, that's different: we were brought up together. Tell me—the Nina he is always talking about—I suppose that is the Italian girl who was at the theatre—and whom he knew in Naples—he used to write home about her——"

"Yes," he said; "and it is only now I am beginning to understand something of the situation. I do believe mental distress has had as much to do with bringing on this fever as anything else: the chill may have been only an accident that developed it. I told you when I saw him, before he was struck down, how he seemed to be all at sixes and sevens with himself—everything wrong—worried, harassed, and sick of life, though he would hardly explain anything: he was always too proud to ask for pity. Well, now, I am piecing together a story, out of these incoherent appeals and recollections that come into his delirium; and if I am right, it is a sad enough one, for it seems to me so hopeless. I believe he was all the time in love with that Nina—Miss Ross—and did not know it; for their asso-

ciation, their companionship, was so constant, so like an intimate friendship. Then there seems to have been some misunderstanding, and she went away unexpectedly—there is a box of jewels and trinkets on the top of the piano, and I am certain these were what she sent back to him when she left. I don't think he has the slightest idea where she is; and that is troubling him more than anything else——”

“But, Maurice,” said Francie, instantly, “could we not find out where she is?—surely she would come and see him and pacify his mind: it would just make all the difference! Surely we could find out where she is?”

Mangan hesitated: it was not the first time this idea had occurred to himself.

“I am afraid,” said he, “that even if we knew where she was, it would be rather awkward to approach her. There may have been something about her going away that prevented Linn from trying to find her out. For one thing, his engagement to Miss Burgoyne. I believe he blundered into that in a sort of reckless despair; but there it is; and there it is likely to be, unfortunately——”

“But surely, surely, Maurice,” said Francie,

"Miss Ross would not make that any obstacle if she knew that her coming would give peace and rest to one who is dangerously ill. Surely she would not think of such a thing at such a time——"

"And then again," he said, "the chances are all against our finding her, if she wishes to remain concealed, or even absent. Linn talks of Malta, of Australia, of San Francisco, and so on; but I don't believe he has the slightest idea where she is. No, I am afraid it's no use thinking of it: the crisis of the fever will be here before any such thing could be tried."

Then he said presently—

"I had a visit from Miss Burgoyne yesterday afternoon."

"I suppose she was terribly distressed," Francie said naturally enough.

"Oh, no. On the contrary, she was remarkably cool and composed. I almost admired her self-possession. She does not think Lionel's throat will suffer; and no doubt she trusts to his sound constitution to pull him through the fever; so perhaps there is not much reason that she should betray any anxiety. Oh, yes, she was very brave about it—and—and business-like. At the same

time I confess to a sort of prejudice in favour of womanly women. I think a little touch of femininity might improve Miss Burgoyne, for example. However, she knows she is in possession; and if Linn pulls through all right, there she is, waiting for him."

It seemed to Francie that her companion had managed to form a pretty strong dislike towards that young lady, considering how little he could possibly know of her.

"I suppose one ought not to contemplate such things," he continued, "but if Linn were to come out of the fever with the loss of his voice, I suspect he would have little trouble in freeing himself from that engagement with Miss Burgoyne."

"But surely a woman could not be so base as to keep a man to an unwilling engagement!" Francie protested, as she had protested before.

"I don't know about that," her companion said. "As I told you, Miss Burgoyne is a business-like person. Linn, with his handsome figure and his fine voice, with his popularity and social position, is a very desirable match for her; but Linn become a nobody—his voice gone—his social success along with it—would be something entirely different. At the same time, Dr. Whitsen agrees with her in

thinking there won't be any permanent injury : it is the fever that is the serious thing."

They went back to the house ; the reports were no better. And all that night Lionel's fevered imaginings did not cease. He was haunted now by visions of cruelties and sufferings being inflicted on some one he knew in a far distant land ; he pleaded with the torturers ; he called for help ; sometimes he said she was dead and released, and there was no more need for him to go away in a ship to seek for her. The wearied brain could get no rest at all. Daylight came, and still he lay there moaning and murmuring to himself. But help was at hand.

Between ten and eleven, Dr. Ballardyce, who had paid his usual morning visit, was going away, and Maurice, as his custom was, went down-stairs with him to hear the last word. He said good-bye to the doctor, and opened the door for him ; and just as he did so he found before him a young woman who was about to ring the bell. She glanced up with frightened eyes ; he was no less startled ; and then, with a hurried 'I beg your pardon,' she turned to go away. But Maurice was by her side in a moment—bare-headed as he was.

"Miss Ross!" he exclaimed—for surely, surely, he could not have mistaken the pale olive face and the beautiful soft dark lustrous eyes; nay, he made bold to put his hand on her arm, so determined was he to detain her.

"I—I only wished to hear how he was—but—but not that he should know," Nina said (she was all trembling, and her lips were pale).

"Oh, yes," Mangan said. "But you must not go away—I have something to tell you—come indoors! You know he is seriously ill—you cannot refuse!—"

There was but an intervening step or two; she timidly followed and entered the little hall; and he closed the door after them.

"Is he so very ill?" she said, in a low voice. "I saw it in the newspapers—I could not wait—but he is not to know that I came—"

"But—but I have something to say to you," he answered her, somewhat breathlessly, for he was uncertain what to do: he only knew that she must not go. "Yes, he is very ill—and distressed—his brain is excited—and we want to calm him. Surely you will come and speak to him—"

She shrank back involuntarily, and there was a pathetic fear in the large, timid eyes.

"Me? No—no!" she said. "Ah, no, I could not do that! Is he so very ill?"

Tears stood in the long black lashes, and she turned her head away.

"But you don't understand," Maurice said, eagerly. "All the way through this illness, it is about you he has been grieving; you have never been out of his thoughts; and if you saw his distress, I know you would do anything in your power to quiet him a little. It is what his cousin said yesterday. 'If we could only find Miss Ross,' she said, 'that would be everything; that would bring him rest; he would be satisfied that she was well, and remembering him, and not gone away for ever.' I never expected to see you; I thought it was useless trying to find you; but now—now—you cannot be so cruel as to refuse him this comfort! You would be sorry if you saw him. Perhaps he might not recognise you—probably not. But if you could persuade him that you really were in London—that you would come some other day soon to see him again—I know that would pacify him, just when peace of mind is all-important. Now, can you refuse?"

"No, no," Nina said, in a low voice; "you will do with me what you like. It is no matter—what

it is to me. Do with me as you please." And then again she turned her large, dark eyes upon him, as if to make sure he was not deceiving her. "Did you say that—that he remembered me—that he had asked for me?"

"Remember you! If you only could have heard the piteous way he has talked of you—always and always—and of your going away. I have such a lot I could tell you! He had those loving-cups filled one night—there was some fancy in his head he could call you back—"

She was sobbing a little; but she bravely dried her tears, and said—

"Tell me what I am to do."

But that was precisely what he did not know himself—for a moment. He considered.

"Come upstairs," he said. "His family are there. I will tell him a visitor has called to see him. He often thinks you are there, but that you won't speak to him. Well, you will just say a few words, to convince him, and as quietly as you can, and come out again. Perhaps he will take it all as a matter of course; and that will be well; and I will tell him you will come again, after he has had some sleep. Of course you must be very calm—too: there must be no excitement."

"No, no," Nina murmured in the same low voice, and she followed him up-stairs.

On entering the sitting-room she glanced apprehensively at those strangers; but Francie, divining in an instant who she was, and why Maurice had brought her hither, immediately came to her, and pressed her hand, in silence.

Maurice went into the sick-room.

"Linn," said he, cheerfully, "I've brought you a visitor; but she can't stay very long; she will come again some other time. You've always been asking about Miss Ross, and why she didn't come to see you: well, here she is!"

Lionel slowly opened his tired eyes and looked towards the door; but he seemed to take no interest in the girl who was standing there, pale, trembling, and quite forgetting all she had been enjoined to do. Lionel, with those restless, fatigued eyes, regarded her, for but a second—then he turned away, shaking his head. He had seen that illusory phantom so often!

"Linn," said his friend, reproachfully, "when Miss Ross comes to see you, are you not going to say a word to her?"

It was Nina herself who interrupted him. She uttered a little cry of appeal and pity—"Leo!"—

she went quickly forward, and threw herself on her knees by the bedside, and seized his hand, and bathed it with her hot tears. "Leo, do you not know me! I am Nina! If you wish me to come back—see! see!—I am here! I kiss your hand—it is Nina!"

He looked at her strangely, and turned with bewildered eyes to Maurice.

"Maurice, is it twelve o'clock? Has she really come this time? Did you hear her speak just now? Is it Nina—at last! at last!"

With her head still bowed down, and her whole frame shaken with her sobbing, but still clasping his hand, she murmured to him some phrase—Maurice guessed it was in the familiar Neapolitan dialect; for Lionel presently said to her—slowly, because of his heavy breathing—

"Ah, you are still *la cianciosella*!—but you have come back—and not to go away! I have forgotten so many things. My head is not well. But wait a little while, Nina—wait a little while—"

"Oh, yes, Leo," she said, and she rose and dried her eyes with her head turned aside somewhat. "I will wait until you have plenty of time to tell me. I shall come and see you whenever you want me."

She looked at Maurice humbly for directions: his eyes plainly said—yes, it was time she should withdraw. She went into the other room—rather blindly, as it seemed to her—and she sank into a chair, still trembling and exhausted; but Francie was by her side in a moment.

“Did he know you?” she asked in an undertone.

“Yes, I think,” Nina answered. “But oh, he looks so strange—so different. He has suffered. It is terrible; but I am glad that I came——”

“It is so kind of you—for I see you are so tired!” said Francie, in her gentle way. “Perhaps you have been travelling?”

“Only last night—but I did not sleep any——”

“Shall I get you some tea?” was the next inquiry.

But here the old doctor, who had been stealthily moving about the room, interfered, and produced a biscuit-box and a decanter of port-wine and a glass; while the old lady begged Miss Ross to take off her cloak and remain with them a little while. At this moment Mangan came out from the sick-room.

“Doctor,” said he in a whisper, “you must go in presently; I think you’ll see a difference. He is

quite pleased and content—talking to himself a little, but not complaining any more. Twice he has said: ‘Maurice, Nina has spoken at last.’”

There was a tinkle of a bell: Maurice answered it with the swiftness of a nurse in a hospital. He returned in a minute—looking a little puzzled.

“He wants to make quite sure you have been here,” he said to Nina, in the same undertone; “and I told him you were in the next room, but that you were tired, and could not see him just now. No, I don’t think it would do for you to go back at present—what do you say, Doctor?—he seems so much more tranquil, and it would be a pity to run any risk. But if you could just let him know you were here—he might hear you talking to us—that would be no harm——”

“I know how to tell Leo that I am here,” Nina said, simply; and she went to the piano and opened it. Then, with the most exquisite softness, she began to play some familiar Neapolitan airs—slowly and gently so that they must have sounded in the sick-chamber like mere echoes of song coming from across wide waters. And would he not understand that it was Nina who was speaking to him; that she was only a few yards from him; and not the ghostly Nina who had so often come

to the sick-room door and remained there strangely silent, but the wilful, gentle, capricious, warm-hearted *cianciosella* who had kissed his hand but a little while ago, and wept over it, amidst her bitter sobs? These were love-songs for the most part that she was playing; but that was neither here nor there; the soft-rippling notes were more like the sound of a trickling waterfall, in some still summer solitude. '*Cannetella, oje Cannetè!*' '*Chello che tu me dice, Nenna, non boglio fà.*' '*Io te voglio bene assaje, e tu non pienz' a me!*' He would know it was Nina who was playing for him—until slowly and slowly, and gently and more gently, the velvet-soft notes gradually ceased, and at length there was silence.

Old Mrs. Moore went over to the girl, and patted her affectionately on the shoulder, and kissed her.

"Lionel has told us a great deal about you," the old lady said; "even when he was in Naples we seemed to know you quite well: and now I hope we shall be friends."

And Nina made answer, with downcast eyes—

"Whenever you wish it, Madame, I shall be glad to come and play a little—if he cares to hear the Neapolitan airs that he used to know in former days."

Yes, there was no doubt that this opportune visit had made a great difference in Lionel's condition; for though the fever did not abate—and could not be expected to abate until the crisis had been reached—there were no more of those agonised pleadings and murmurings that showed such deep distress of mind. Frequently, indeed, he seemed to know nothing of what had occurred; he would talk of Nina as being in Naples, or as having gone down to the theatre; but all the same he was more tranquil. As for Nina, she said she would do just as they wished. She had arrived in London that morning, and had gone to Mrs. Grey's, in Sloane-street, and engaged a room. She could go down there now, and wait until she was sent for, if they thought it would please Lionel to know that one of his former companions had come to see him. She put it very prettily and modestly: it was only as an old ally and comrade of Lionel's that she was here; perhaps he might be glad to know of her presence. Or, if they thought that might disturb him, she would not come back at all; she would be content to hear, from time to time, how the fever was going on, if she might be permitted to call and ask the people below.

It was Maurice who answered her.

“If you don’t mind, Miss Ross,” said he, “I should like you to be here just as much as ever you found convenient. I keep telling Lionel you are in the next room ; and that, at any moment he wants, you will play some of those Neapolitan airs for him ; and he seems satisfied. It has been the worst part of his delirium that he fancied you were away in some distant place, and were being cruelly ill-used ; and he has excited himself dreadfully about it. Well, we don’t want that to come back ; and if at any moment I can say ‘ But look !—here is Nina ’—I beg your pardon ! ” said Mangan, blushing furiously, and looking as sheepish as a caught schoolboy. “ I mean if I could say to him ‘ Look ! here is Miss Ross, perfectly safe and well,’ that would pacify him.”

“ And if you are fatigued after your journey,” said Dr. Moore, who was a firm believer in the fine old-fashioned fortifying theory, “ we shall be having our mid-day meal by and by, in a room up-stairs, and I’m sure we’ll make you heartily welcome.”

“ And I think, my dear,” said the mother, rising from her chair, and taking the girl kindly by the hand, “ that if you and I and Francie were to go up there now, we should be more out of the way ;

and there would be no chance of our talking being heard."

It was at this plain but substantial mid-day meal, served in an up-stairs room, that Nina incidentally told them something of her adventures and experiences during the past six months, though of course nothing was said about her reasons for leaving London. Maurice happened to inquire where it was that she had heard of Lionel's illness.

"In Glasgow," said Nina. "I saw about it in a newspaper yesterday; I came up by the train last night, because—because—" here some slight colour appeared in the pale clear complexion—"because if an old friend is very ill, one wishes to be near." And perhaps it was to escape from this little embarrassment that she proceeded to say: "Oh, they are so kind, the Glasgow people: I have never seen such domesticity." She glanced at Maurice, as if to see whether the word was right: then she went on. "When I was engaged by the Director of the Saturday Evening Concerts, he told me that they had to change their singers frequently, that if I wished to remain in Glasgow or Edinburgh, I must sing at private concerts, and give lessons, to have continual employment. And

there was not much difficulty: oh, they are so enthusiastic, the Scotch people, about music!—to sing in the St. Andrews' Hall or the City Hall—and especially if you sing one of their own Scotch songs—the enthusiasm, the applause, it is like fire going through the nerves. Well, it is very pleasant, but it is not enough employment, even though I get one or two other engagements, like the Edinburgh Orchestral Festival. No, it is not enough; but then I began to sing at musical evenings, in the fashionable private houses, and also to give lessons in the daytime; and then it was I began to know the kindness of that people, their consideration, their benignantness to a stranger, their good humour, and good wishes to you. Oh, a little brusque sometimes, the father of a family, perhaps: the lady of the house and her daughters—never! More than once a lady has said to me 'What, are you all alone in this big town!—my daughters will call for you to-morrow and take you to the Botanic Gardens; and after you will come back to tea.' Or again they have shown me photographs of a beautiful large house—like a castle, almost—on the side of a hill, among trees; and they say 'That is our house in the summer; it is by the sea; if you are here in the summer,

you must come and stay with us, and you will play lawn-tennis with the girls, and go boating with them, and fishing, all day; then every evening we will have a little concert——”

“I beg your pardon,” interposed the blunt-tongued doctor, “but do you call that Scotch hospitality, Miss Ross?—to invite a professional singer to their house, and get her services for nothing?”

“Ah, no, no, you mistake,” said Nina, putting up the palm of her right hand for a second. “You mistake. I was offered terms as well—generous, oh, yes, very generous; but it was not that that impressed me—it was their kindness—their admitting me into their domesticity—I have found the mother as kind to me as to her own daughters. No airs of patronage; they did not say ‘You are a foreigner; we cannot trust you;’ they said ‘You are alone; come into our family, and be friends with us.’ But not at once; no, no; for at first I did not know any one——”

“I should think it would be easy for you to make friends anywhere,” said Francie, in her gentle fashion.

They did not linger long over that meal; it was hardly a time for feasting; indeed, Maurice had

gone down before the others, to hear the nurse's report. She had nothing to say; the sick-room had been so still, she had not even ventured in, hoping the patient was asleep.

That afternoon there were many callers; and Mangan, who went down to such of them as wanted to have special intelligence, was pleased in a way. "Well," he would say to himself, as he went up and down the stairs, "the public have a little gratitude, after all, and even mere acquaintances do think of you occasionally. It is something. But if you should go under, if you should drop out from amid the universal forward-hurrying throng: what then? If you have done something that can be mentioned, in art, or letters, or science, the newspapers may toss you a paragraph; or if you have been a notorious criminal, or charlatan, or windbag, they may even devote a leader to you; but the multitude—what time have they to think? A careless eye glances at the couple of obituary lines that have been paid for by relatives: then onwards again. Perhaps, here and there, one solitary heart is struck deep; and remembers; but the ordinary crowd of one's acquaintances—what time have they? Good-bye, friend!—but we are in such a hurry!" Nevertheless, he was glad to

tell Lionel of these callers, and of their flowers, and cards, and messages, and what not.

On this Tuesday afternoon Miss Burgoyne also called ; but hearing that there were some relations come, she would not go up-stairs. Maurice went down to see her.

“What brought on this fever?” she asked, after the usual inquiries.

“A variety of causes, I should imagine,” he answered. “The immediate one was a severe chill.”

“They say he has lost all his money, and is deeply in debt,” she observed.

“Who says?” he demanded—too sharply, for he did not like this woman.

“Oh, I have heard of it,” she answered.

“It is not true then. I don’t know of his being in debt at all ; if he is, he has friends who will see him through, until he gets all right again.”

“Oh, well,” she said, apparently much relieved, “it is of no great consequence, so long as his voice is not touched. With his voice he can always retrieve himself, and keep well ahead. They do tell such stories. Thank you, Mr. Mangan—Good-bye !”

“Good-bye,” said he, with unnecessary coldness : why should a disciple of Marcus Aurelius take

umbrage at any manifestation of our common human nature ?

She turned for a moment as he opened the door for her.

“Tell him I called ; and that his portrait and mine are to appear in this week’s *Footlights*—in the same number.”

“Very well.”

“Good-bye !”

When Dr. Ballardyce came that evening to make his usual examination, his report was of a twofold character : the fever was still ravaging the now enfeebled constitution—the temperature, in especial, being seriously high ; but the patient seemed much calmer in mind.

“Indeed,” said the doctor to Maurice, at the foot of the stair, as he was going away, “I should say that for the moment the delirium was quite gone. But I did not speak much to him. Quiet is the great thing—sleep above all.”

Then Maurice told him what had happened during the day ; and asked him whether, supposing they found Lionel quite sane and sensible, it would be advisable to tell him that Miss Ross was in the house, or even ask her to go and see him.

"Well, I should say not—not unless he appears to be troubled again. His present tranquillity of mind is everything that could be wished; I would not try any unnecessary experiment. Probably he does not know now that he has even seen her. Sometimes they have a vague recollection of something having happened; more frequently the whole thing is forgotten. Wait till we see how the fever goes: when he is convalescent—perhaps then."

But Maurice, on his own responsibility, went into the sick-room after the doctor had left—went in on tip-toe, lest Lionel should be asleep. He was not asleep. He looked at Mangan.

"Maurice, come here," he said, in a hard-labouring voice.

"You're not to talk, Linn," his friend answered, with a fine affectation of carelessness. "I merely looked in to see how you were getting on. There's no news. The Government seem to be in a mess, but even their own friends are ashamed of their vacillation. They're talking of still another lyric Theatre; you'll have to save up your voice, Linn—by Jove, you fellows will be in tremendous request. What else? Oh, nothing. There's been a plucky thing done by a servant-girl in rescuing

two children from a fire—if there's a little testimonial to her, I'm in with my humble guinea. But there's nothing in the papers—I'm glad I'm not a leader-writer."

He went and got some more water for a jug of white lilies that stood on the table; and began to put things a little straight—as if he were a woman.

"Maurice!"

"You're not to talk, Linn, I tell you!"

"I must—just a word," Lionel said; and Mangan was forced to listen. "What does the doctor really say?"

"About you?—oh, you're going on first-rate! Only you've to keep still and quiet, and not trouble about anything."

"What day is this?"

"Why, Tuesday."

He thought for a little.

"It—it was a Saturday I was taken ill? I have forgotten so many things. But—but there's this, Maurice: if anything happens to me—the piano in the next room—it belongs to me—you will give that to Francie for her wedding-present. I would have—given her something more, but you know. And if you ever hear of Nina Rossi, will you ask

her to—to take some of the things in a box you'll find on the top of the piano—they all belonged to her—if she won't take them all back, she must take some—as a—as a keepsake. She ought to do that. Perhaps she won't think I treated her so badly—when it's all over—”

He lay back exhausted with this effort.

“Oh, stuff and nonsense, Linn!” his friend exclaimed, in apparent anger. “What's the use of talking like that! You know you were worried into this illness; and I want to explain to you that you needn't worry any longer, that you've nothing to do but get well! Now listen—and be quiet. To begin with Lord Rockminster has got his £300——”

“I remember about that—it was awfully good of you, Maurice——”

“Be quiet. Then there's that diabolical £1100. Well, things have to be faced,” continued Mangan, with a matter-of-fact air. “It's no use sighing and groaning when you or your friends are in a pickle: you've just got to make the best of it. Very well. Do you see this slip of paper?—this is a cheque for £1100, drawn out and signed by me, Maurice Mangan, barrister-at-law, and author of several important works not yet written. I took it up this

afternoon to that young fellow's rooms in Bruton-street, to get a receipt for the money, for I thought that would satisfy you better ; but I found he was in Paris. Never mind. There is the cheque ; and I am going to post it directly ; so that he will get it the moment he returns—— ”

“ Maurice, you must ask Francie.”

“ I will not ask Francie,” his friend said promptly. “ Francie must attend to her own affairs until she has acquired the legal right to control me and mine. You needn't make a fuss about a little thing like that, Linn. I can easily make it up ; in fact, I may say I have already secured a means of making it up, as a telegram I received this very afternoon informs me. Here is the story : I can talk to you, if you may not talk to me ; and I want you to know that everything is straight and clear and arranged. About ten days ago I had a letter from a syndicate in the north asking me if I could write for them a weekly article—not a London correspondent's news-letter—but a series of comments on the important subjects of the day, outside politics. Outside politics, of course ; for I dare say they will supply this article to sixty or eighty country papers. Very well. You know what a lazy wretch I am : I declined.

Then yesterday, when I was dawdling about the house here, it suddenly occurred to me that after all I couldn't do better than sit down and write to my enterprising friends in the north, and tell them that they could have that weekly column of enlightenment, if they hadn't engaged any one else, and if they were prepared to pay well enough for it. This afternoon comes their answer: here it is—'Offer still open: will four hundred suit you?' 400*l.* a year will suit me very well."

"Maurice, you're taking on all that additional work on my account," Lionel managed to say, by way of feeble protest.

"I am taking it on to cure myself of atrocious habits of indolence. And look at the educational process. I shall have to read all the important new books, and attend the Private Views, and examine the working of local government: bless you, I shall become a compendium of information on every possible modern subject. Then think of the power I shall wield: let Quirk and his gang beware!—I shall be able to kick those log-rollers all over the country—there will be a buffet for them here, and a buffet for them there, until they'll go to their mothers and ask, with tears in their eyes, why they ever were born. Or will it be worth

while? No. They are hardly important enough; the public don't heed them. But the 400*l.* is remarkably important—to any one looking forward to having an extravagant spendthrift of a wife on his hands; and so you see, Linn, everything promises well. And I will say good-night to you now—though I am not leaving the house yet—oh, no!—you can send the nurse for me if you want me. Schlaf' wohl!”

The sick man murmured something unintelligible in reply, and then lay still.

Now Maurice Mangan had spoken of his dawdling about this house; but the fact was that he had his hands full from morning till night. The mere correspondence he had to answer was considerable. Then there were the visitors, and the doctors, to be received; and the nurse to be looked after; and the anxious mother to be appeased and reassured. Indeed, on this evening, the old lady, hearing that her son was sensible, begged and entreated to be allowed to go in and talk to him; and it took both her husband and Maurice to dissuade her.

“You see,” said Mangan, “he's used to me; he doesn't mind my going in and out; but if he finds you have all come up from Winstead, he may be suddenly alarmed. Better wait until the crisis is

over—then you may take the place of the nurse whenever you like.”

Shortly thereafter the old people and Francie left for their hotel; then Maurice had to see about Nina, whom they had left in the upstairs-room.

“Just as you wish,” she said, with a kind of pathetic humility in her eyes. “If I can be of any service, I will stay all the night; a chair, here, will be enough for me. Indeed, I should be glad to be allowed——”

“No, no,” said he, “at present you could not be of any use; you must get away home and have a sound night’s rest after your travelling. I have just called the nurse; she will be down in a minute. And if you will put on your things I will send for a four-wheeled cab for you; or I will walk along with you until we get one.”

All day long Nina had betrayed no outward anxiety; she had merely listened intently to every word, watched intently the expression of every face, as the doctors came and went. And now, as Mangan shut the door behind them, he did not care to discuss the chances of the fever: it was a subject all too uncertain and too serious for a few farewell words. But there was one point on which,

delicate as it might be, he felt bound to question her.

"Miss Röss," said he, "I hope you won't think me impertinent. You must consider I represent Lionel. I am in his place. Very well; he would probably ask you, in coming so suddenly to London, whether you were quite sufficiently provided with funds—you see I am quite blunt about it—for your lodgings and cabs and so forth. I know he would ask you, and you wouldn't be angry: well, consider that I ask you in his place."

"I thank you," said Nina, in a low voice. "I understand. It is what Leo would do—yes—he was always like that. But I have plenty. I have brought everything with me. I do not go back to Glasgow."

"No?" said he; and then, rather hesitatingly, for it was dangerous ground, he added: "Wasn't it strange that, with you singing at those public concerts in Glasgow, Lionel should never have seen your name in the papers—should never have guessed where you were?"

"I took another name—Signorina Teresa I was," Nina said, simply.

"So you are not going back to Glasgow?" he asked again.

"No. The concert season is about over there. Besides," she added, rather sadly, "I have been—a little—a little homesick. The people there were very kind to me; but I was much alone. So now—when Lionel is over the worst of the fever—when he promises to get well—when you say to me I can be of no more use—then I return to Naples to my friends."

"Oh, to Naples? But what to do there?" he made bold to ask.

"Ah, who knows?" said Nina, in so low a voice that he could hardly hear.

He put her safely into a four-wheeled cab; then went back to Lionel's rooms to see that all arrangements were made for the night; finally he set out for his own chambers in Westminster. No, it had not been a dawdling day for him at all: on the contrary, he had not had time to glance at a single newspaper; and now, as he got some hot drink for himself, and lit his pipe, and hauled in an easy-chair to the fire, he thought he would look over the evening journals. And about the first paragraph he saw was headed 'Death of Sir Barrington Miles, M.P.' Well, it was a bit of a coincidence, he considered; nothing more; the 1100*l.* had been paid; and, apart from that cir-

cumstance, it must be confessed his interest in the Miles family was of the slightest. Only he wondered what the young man had been doing in Paris, with his father so near the point of death.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHANGES.

SHORTLY after ten on the Wednesday morning a young gentleman clad in travelling costume drove up to the door of a house in Edgeware-road, got out of the hansom, stepped across the pavement, and rang the bell. The smart little maidservant who answered the summons appeared to know him, but was naturally none the less surprised by so early a visit.

"Miss Burgoyne isn't down yet, sir!" she said, in answer to his inquiries.

"Very well, I will wait," said the young man, who seemed rather hurried and nervous. "Will you tell her that I wish to see her on a matter of great importance. She will know what it is."

Well, it was not the business of this rosy-cheeked maid to check the vagaries of impetuous lovers; so she merely said—

“Will you step up-stairs, sir : there’s a fire in the morning-room.”

She led the way, and when she had left him in the bright little chamber—where breakfast-things for one were laid on the table—she departed to find, perhaps to arouse, her mistress. The young man went to the window, and stared into the street. He returned to the fire, and stared into the red flames. He took up a newspaper that was on the table, and opened it, but could not fix his attention. And no wonder ; for he had just succeeded to a baronetcy and the extensive Petmansworth estates ; and he was determined to win a bride as well—even as he was on his way to his father’s funeral.

Miss Burgoyne was some considerable time before she came down ; and when she did make her appearance she seemed none too well pleased by this unconscionable intrusion : at the same time she had paid some little attention to her face, and she wore a most charming tea-gown of pink and sage-green.

“Well ?” she said, rather coldly. “What now ? I thought you had gone over to Paris !”

“But don’t you know what has happened !” he said, rather breathlessly.

“What has happened?”

He took up the newspaper, opened it, and handed it to her in silence, showing her a particular paragraph.

“Oh?” she said, with startled eyes, and yet she read the lines slowly, to give time for consideration. And then she recollected that she ought to express sympathy. “I am so very sorry—so sudden and unexpected—it must have been such a shock to you. But,” she added, after a second,—“but why are you here? You ought to have gone home at once—”

“I’m on my way home—I only got the telegram yesterday afternoon—I reached London this morning,” the young man said, disconnectedly: all his eager and wistful attention was concentrated on her face: what answer was about to appear there to his urgent prayer? “Don’t you understand why I am here—dear Kate?” said he, and he advanced a little, but very timidly.

“Well, really,” said she, for she was bound to appear a trifle shocked, “when such a dreadful thing happens—your father’s sudden death—really I think that should be the first thing in your mind—I think you ought not to delay a moment in going home—”

"You think me heartless—but you don't understand," said he, eager to justify himself in her eyes. "Of course I'm sorry. But my father and I never got on very well. He was always trying to thwart me—"

"Yes, but for the sake of mere outward form and decency," she ventured to say.

"That's just it!" he said quickly. "I'll have to go away down there; and I don't know how long I may be kept; and—and—I thought if I could take with me some assurance that these altered circumstances would weigh with you—you see, dear Kate, I am my own master now—I can do what I like—and you know what it is I ask. Now tell me—you will be my wife! I can quite understand your hesitating before; I was dependent upon my father; if he had disapproved there might have been trouble; but now it is different—"

Miss Burgoyne stood silent, her eyes fixed on the floor, her fingers interclasped. He looked at her. Then finding she had no answer for him, a curious change of expression came over his face.

"And if you hesitate now," he said, vindictively. "I know the reason, and I know it is a reason you may as well put out of your mind. Oh, I am

quite aware of the shilly-shallying that has been going on between you and that fellow Moore—I know you’ve been struck, like all the rest of the women—but you may as well give up that fancy. Mr. Moore isn’t much of a catch, *now!*”

She raised her head, and there was an angry flash in her eyes that for a second frightened him.

“Magnanimous!” she said, with a curl of her lip. “To taunt a man with being ill!—when perhaps he is lying on his death-bed!”

“It is not because he is ill,” he retorted; and his naturally pale face was somewhat paler. “I dare say he’ll get well enough again. It is because he is dead broke and ruined. And do you know who did it?” he went on, more impetuously still. “Well, I did it! I said I would break him; and I broke him. I knew he was only playing with you and making a fool of you; and I said to myself that I would have it out with him—either he or I would have to go to the right about. I said I would smash him; and I have smashed him. Do you see this cheque? That was waiting for me at my rooms this morning. Eleven hundred pounds—that was two days’ work only; and I had plenty more before. But do you think it is his

cheque? Not a bit! It is drawn out by a friend of his. It is lent him. He is just so much the more in debt; and I don't believe he has a farthing in the world. And that's the wonderful creature all you women are worshipping!"

Now this foolish boy ought to have taken care; but he had been carried away on a whirlwind of jealous rage. All the time that he was pouring forth his vengeful story, Miss Burgoyne's face had become more and more hard. And when he ceased, she answered him, in low and measured tones that conveyed the most bitter scorn.

"Yes," she said, "we women are worthy of being despised, when—when we think anything of such creatures as men are capable of showing themselves to be! Oh, it is a fine time to come and boast of what you have done, when the man you hate—when the man you *fear*—is lying ill, delirious, perhaps dying. That is the time to boast of your strength, your prowess! And how dare you come to me," she continued, with a sudden toss of her head, "with all this story of gambling and debt? What is it to me? It seems that is the way men fight now—with a pack of cards! That is fighting between men—and the victor waves a cheque in triumph—and comes and

brags about it to women! Well—I—I don't appreciate—such—such manliness. I think you had better—go and see to your father's funeral—instead of—of bringing such a story to me!" said Miss Burgoyne, with heaving bosom; and it was real indignation this time; for there were tears in her eyes as she turned proudly away from him and marched straight for the door of the room.

"For Heaven's sake!" he cried, intercepting her. "Kate, I did not mean to offend you! I take back what I said. How could any one help being jealous—seeing your off and on relations with him all this time; and you would never say one thing or another. Forgive me—"

She turned to him, and there were still indignant tears in her eyes.

"It isn't fair!" she said. "It isn't fair!—he is ill—you might have a little humanity—"

"Yes, I know," he said, quite humbly and imploringly (for this young man was in a bad way, and had lost his head as well as his heart). "And I didn't mean half what I said—indeed I didn't! And—and you shouldn't reproach me with not going at once down to Petmansworth, when you know the cause. I shall be among a lot of people who won't know my relations to you—I shall have

all kinds of duties before me now—and I wanted to take with me one word of assurance. Even if it was only sympathy I wanted, why should I not come first to you, when you are the one I care for most in the world? Isn't it a proof of that, when my first thought is of you, when **this** great change has taken place? Don't you see how you will be affected by it—at least, if you say yes. I know you are fond of the theatre, and of all the flattery you get, and bouquets, and newspaper-notices; but you might find another way of life just as satisfying to your pride—I mean a natural pride, a self-respect such as every woman should have. Oh, I don't mind your remaining on the stage, for a time, any way; we could not be married for at least six months, I suppose, according to usual observances; but I think if you knew how you could play the part of great lady down at Petmansworth, that might have as much attraction for you as the theatre. I was considering in the train last night," continued this luckless youth—studying every feature of his mistress's face for some favourable sign of yielding—"that perhaps you might agree to a private marriage, in a week or two's time, by private licence; and we could have the marriage announced later on—"

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"Oh, Percy, you frighten me," said the young lady, whose wrath was clearly being mollified by his persuasive words—or perhaps by other considerations. "I couldn't think of such a thing! Oh, no, no! What would my people say? And what would the public say, when it all came out?"

"I only offered the suggestion," said he submissively. "It would be making everything sure, that was all. But I can quite understand that a young lady would rather have a grand wedding, and presents, and a list of friends in the *Morning Post*: well, I don't insist; it was only a fancy I had, last night in the train; but I am sure I would rather study your wishes in every respect."

She stood silent for a little time, he intently waiting her answer.

"It is too serious a matter for me to decide by myself," she said at last, in a low voice.

"But who else has any right to interfere!" he exclaimed. "Why should you not decide for yourself? You know I love you—you have seen it—and I have waited and waited—and borne with a good deal. But then I was hardly in a position to demand an answer; there would have been some risk on your part; and I hesitated. Now there can be none. Dear Kate, you are going to say

one word!—and I shall go away down to all this sad business that lies before me with a secret comfort that none of them will suspect.”

“It is too sudden, Percy,” she said, lingeringly; “I must have time to consider——”

“What have you to consider?” he remonstrated.

“A great many things,” she said, evasively. “You don’t know how a girl is situated. Here is papa coming to town this very morning—Jim and Cicely have gone up to Paddington to meet him. Well, I don’t know how he might regard it. If you wanted me to leave the theatre altogether, it would make a great difference: I do a good deal for Jim and Cicely——”

“But, Katie,” he said, and he took her hand in spite of her, “these are only matters of business! Do you think I can’t make all that straight? Say yes!”—and he strove to draw her towards him, and would have kissed her, but that she withdrew a step, with her cheeks flushing prettily through the thin make-up of the morning.

“You must give me time, Percy,” she said, with downcast eyes. “I must know what papa says.”

“What time?”

“Well—a week,” she said.

“A week be it: I won’t worry you beyond your patience, dear Kate,” said this infatuated young man. “But I know what you will have to say then—to make me the happiest of human beings alive on this earth. Good-bye, dearest!”

And with that he respectfully kissed her hand, and took his leave; and so soon as she was sure he was out of the house, she rang for breakfast, and called down to the little maid to look sharp with it, too. She was startled and pleased, in one direction; and, in another, perhaps a trifle vexed; for what business had any man coming bothering her with a proposal of marriage before breakfast? How could she help displaying a little temper, when she was hungry, and he over pertinacious? Yet she hoped she had not been too outspoken in her anger—for there were visions before her mind that somehow seemed agreeable.

That was another anxious day for those people in Piccadilly; for the fever showed no signs of abating, while some slight delirium returned from time to time. Nina, of course, was in constant attendance; and when he began, in his wanderings, to speak of her, and to ask Maurice what had become of her, she would simply go into the room, and take a seat by the bed-side, and talk to him

just as if they had met by accident in the Piazza Cavour. For he had got it into his head now that they were in Naples again.

“Oh, yes, it is all right, Leo,” she would say, putting her cool hand on his burning one, “they will all be in time, the whole party; when we get down to the *Risposta*, they will all be there; and perhaps Sabetta will bring her zither in its case. Then there will be the long sail across the blue water; and Capri coming nearer and nearer; then the landing, and the donkeys, and the steep climb up and up. Where shall we go, Leo?—to the Hotel Pagano, or the Tiberio? The Pagano?—very well, for there is the long balcony shaded from the sun, and after luncheon, we shall have chairs taken out—yes, and you can smoke there—and you will laugh to see Andrea go to the front of the railings, and sing ‘Al ben de tuoi qual vittima,’ with his arms stretched out like a windmill, and Carmela very angry with him that he is so ridiculous. But then no one hears—what matter?—no one except those perhaps in the small garden-house for the billiard. Will there be moonlight to-night before we get back? To-morrow Pandiani will grumble. Well, let him grumble: I am not afraid of him—no!”

So she would carelessly talk him back into quietude again; and then she would stealthily withdraw from the room, and perhaps go to the piano, and begin to play some Neapolitan air—but so softly that the notes must have come to him like music in a dream.

Lord Rockminster called that afternoon, and was shown up-stairs.

“I am going down to Scotland to-night,” said he to Maurice, “and I have just got a telegram from Miss Cunyngham—you may have heard of her from Mr. Moore?—”

“Oh, yes,” Mangan said.

“She wishes me to bring her the latest news.”

Well, he was told what there was to tell—which was not much, amidst all this dire uncertainty. He looked perplexed.

“I should like to have taken Miss Cunyngham some more reassuring message,” he said, thoughtfully. “I suppose there is nothing either she or I could do?” And then he drew Maurice aside, and spoke in an undertone. “Except perhaps this. I have heard that Moore has been playing a little high of late—and has burnt his fingers. I hope you won’t let his mind be harassed by money-matters. If a temporary loan will serve, and for

a considerable amount if necessary, I shall rely on your writing to me : may I ? ”

“ It is exceedingly kind of you,” Maurice said—but made no further promise.

No, Lionel had not been forgotten by all his fashionable friends. That same afternoon a package arrived, which, according to custom, Maurice opened, lest some acknowledgment should be necessary. It proved to be Lady Adela Cunyngham’s new novel—the three volumes prettily bound in white parchment.

“ Is the woman mad with vanity ? ” said Francie, in hot indignation, “ to send him her trash at such a time as this ? ”

Maurice laughed : it was not often that the gentle Francie was so vehement.

“ Why, Francie, it was the best she could do,” he said. “ For when he is able to read it it will send him to sleep.”

He was still turning over the leaves of the first volume.

“ Oh, look here,” he cried. “ Here is the dedication—‘ To Octavius Quirk, Esq., M.A., in sincere gratitude for much kindly help and encouragement.’ Now that is very indiscreet. The log-rollers don’t like books being dedicated to

them ; it draws the attention of the public ; and exposes the game. Ah, well, not many members of the public will see *that* dedication ! ”

A great change, however, was now imminent. Saying as little as possible—indeed, making all kinds of evasions and excuses, so as not to alarm the women-folk—old Dr. Moore intimated that he thought it advisable he should sit up this night with Lionel ; and Maurice, though he promised Francie he would go home as soon as she and the old lady had left, was too restless to keep his word. They feared, they hoped—they knew not what. Would the exhausted system hold out any longer against the wasting ravages of this fell disease, or succumb and sink into coma and death ? Or would Nature herself step in, and with her gentle fingers close the tired eyes and bring restoring sleep and calm ? Maurice meant to go home, but could not. First of all, he stayed late. Then, when the nurse came down, she was bidden to go back to bed again, if she liked. Hour after hour passed. He threw himself on the sofa, but it was not to close his eyes. And yet all seemed going well in the sick-room. Both the Doctor and he had convinced themselves that Lionel was now asleep—no lethargic stupor this time, but actual

sleep, from which everything was to be hoped. Maurice would not speak; he wrote on slips of paper, when he had anything to say. And so the long night went by, until the window-panes slowly changed from black to blue, and from blue to grey.

About eight o'clock in the morning the old Doctor came out of the room, and Maurice knew in a moment the nature of his tidings.

"All is going well," he whispered. "The temperature is steadily decreasing—nearly three degrees since last night; and he is now in a profound sleep: the crisis is over, and happily over, as I imagine. I'm going along to tell his mother and Francie—and to go to bed for a bit."

And Maurice? Well, here was the nurse; he was not wanted; he was a good-natured sort of person; and he had seen how patiently and faithfully Nina had concealed her grief, and done mutely everything they wanted of her. A few minutes' drive in a hansom would take him down to Sloane-street; the fresh air would be pleasant—for his head felt stupefied for want of rest; and why should not Nina have this glad intelligence at the first possible moment? So forth he went, into the white light of the fresh April morning; and presently he

was rattling away westward, as well as the eastward-flowing current of the newly-awakened town would allow. But very much surprised was he, when he got to Mrs. Grey's house, to find that Nina was not there. She had gone out very early in the morning, the maidservant told him; she had done so the last two or three days back—without waiting for breakfast even.

“But where does she go?” he demanded, wondering.

“I don't know, sir,” the girl said; so there was nothing for it but to walk leisurely away back to Piccadilly—after all, Nina would be sure to make her appearance at the usual hour, which was about ten.

By the time he was nearing Lionel's lodgings again, he had forgotten all about Nina; he was thinking that now, since Lionel seemed on a fair way to recovery, there might be a little more leisure for Francie and himself to talk over their own plans and prospects. He was on the southern side of Piccadilly; and sometimes he glanced into the Green Park; when suddenly his eye was caught by a figure that somehow appeared familiar. Was not that Miss Ross—walking slowly along a pathway between the trees, her head bent down, though

sometimes she turned and looked up towards the houses, for but a second, as if she were asking some unspoken, pathetic question. She was about opposite Lionel's rooms; but some little way inside the Park, so that it was not probable she could be seen from the windows. Well, Maurice walked back until he found a gate, entered, and went forward and overtook her. In fact, she seemed to be simply going this way and that, hovering about the one spot, while ever and anon a hopeless glance was cast on the unresponsive house-fronts up there.

"Miss Ross!" he said.

She turned quickly, and, when she saw who it was, her face paled with alarm. For a moment she could not speak. Her eyes questioned him—and yet not eagerly: there was a terrible dread there as well.

"Why are you here?" he asked, in his surprise.

"I could not rest within-doors—I wished to be nearer," she answered, hurriedly; and then fixing her eyes on him, she said, "Well? What is it? What do they say?"

"Oh, but I have good news for you," said he; "such excellent news that I went away down to

Sloane-street, so that you could hear it without delay. The crisis is over; and everything going on satisfactorily."

She murmured something in her native tongue, and turned away her face. He waited a minute or two, until she brushed her handkerchief across her eyes, and raised her head somewhat.

"Come," said he, "we will go in now. I hear you have had no breakfast. Do you want to be ill too? Mrs. Jenkins will get you something. We can't have two invalids on our hands."

She accompanied him, with the silent obedience she had shown all the way through; she only said, in a low voice, as he opened the door for her—

"I wonder if Lionel will ever know how kind you have been to every one."

This was a happy day for that household; though their joy was subdued; for a shadow of possibilities still hung over them. And perhaps it was the knowledge that now there was every probability of the greater danger being removed that caused a certain exaggeration of minor troubles and brought them to the front. When Mangan begged his betrothed to go out for a five minutes' stroll in the Park before lunch, he found, after all,

that it was not his and her own affairs that claimed their chief attention.

"I don't know what to do, Francie," he said, ruefully. "I'm in a regular fix, and no mistake. Here is Nina—it seems more natural to call her Nina, doesn't it?—well, she talks of going away to-morrow, now that Linn is in a fair way to get better. She is quite aware that he does not know she has been in London, or that he has seen her; and now she wishes he should never be told; and that she may get safely away again, and matters be just as they were before. I don't quite understand her, perhaps; she is very proud, for one thing; but she is very much in love with him—poor thing, she has tried to conceal it as well as ever she could; but you must have seen it, Francie—a woman's eyes must have seen it—"

"Oh, yes, Maurice!" his companion said; then she added—"And—and don't you think Linn is just as much in love with her? I am sure of it! It's just dreadful to think of her going away again—these two being separated as they were before—and Linn perhaps fretting himself into another illness, though never speaking a word—"

"But how am I to ask her to stay?" Maurice demanded, as if in appeal to her woman's wit.

"There's Miss Burgoyne. Linn himself could only ask Nina to stay on one condition—and Miss Burgoyne makes it impossible."

"Then," said Francie, grown bold, "if I were you, Maurice, I would go straight to Miss Burgoyne, and I would say to her 'My friend Lionel is in love with another woman; he never was in love with you at all; *now* will you marry him?'"

"Yes, very pretty," he said, moodily. "The first thing she would do would be to call a policeman and get me locked up as a raging lunatic. And what would Linn say to me about such interference, when he came to hear of it? No, I must leave them to manage their own affairs, however they may turn out; the only thing I should like in the meantime would be for Nina to see Linn before she goes. That's all; and that I think I could manage."

"How, Maurice?"

"Well, there is simply nothing she wouldn't do for Linn's sake," he made answer; "and if I were to tell her I thought it would greatly help his recovery if he were to know that she was well, that she was here in London, and ready to be friends with him, and looking forward to his getting better, then I am pretty sure she would remain for that

little time at least, and do anything we asked of her. Of course it would not do for them to meet just now—Linn is too weak to stand any excitement—and he will be so for some time to come: still, I think Nina would wait that time if we told her she could be of help. Then once these two have seen each other and spoken, let them take the management of their own affairs. Why, good gracious me," he exclaimed, in lighter tones, "haven't you and I got our own affairs to manage, too? I have just been drawing up a code of regulations for the better governing of a wife!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Francie.

"Yes, indeed!" said he firmly. "I am a believer in the good old robust virtues that have made England what she is—or rather, what she has been. I'm not a sentimentalist. If the sentimentalists, and the theorists, and the faddists go on as they are doing, they'll soon leave us without any England at all; England will be moralised away to nothing; there will only be her name, and her literature, left to remind the world that she once existed. The equal rights of women—that's one of their fads. The equal rights of women! Bosh! Women ought to be very proud and grateful that they are allowed

to live at all ! However, that is a general principle ; the particular application of it is that a man should be master in his own house, and that his wife's first and paramount duty is to obey him—”

“ You shouldn't frighten me too soon, Maurice,” she said—but she did not appear to be terribly scared.

“ And I mean to begin as I mean to end,” said he, ominously, as they were about to cross the street on their way back. “ I am not going to marry a wife who will have all her interests out of doors. I will not allow it. A woman, madam, should attend to her own house and her own husband, and not spend her time in gadding about hospitals and sick wards, and making friends and companions of nurses.”

Francie laughed at him.

“ Why, Maurice,” said she, as they were about to enter, “ you yourself are the very best nurse I ever saw ! ”

But it was not in this mood that Mangan received Miss Burgoyne when she called that afternoon to make inquiries. She and her brother were shown to the room upstairs ; and thither Mangan followed them. He was very polite, and cold, and courteous ; told her that Lionel was

getting on very well ; that the fever was subsiding, and that he was quite sensible again, though very weak ; and said he hoped his complete recovery was now only a question of time. But when the young lady—with more hesitation than she usually displayed—preferred a request that she might be allowed to see Mr. Moore, Maurice met that by a gently decisive negative.

“He is not to be disturbed in any way. Perfect rest is what the doctors ordain. He has been left a wreck ; but his fine constitution will pull him through ; in the meantime we have to be most careful.”

She was silent and thoughtful for a minute.

“I can’t see him ?”

“I think not—it would be most unwise. You would not wish to do anything inconsiderate.”

“Oh, certainly not. May I write to him then ?” she asked.

“It will be some time before he can attend to any letters. You have no idea how weak he is. We want him to remain in perfect rest and quiet.”

“This is Thursday,” she said. “Supposing everything goes well, and I called on Tuesday next, could I see him then ?”

“By that time it would be easier to say,” he

answered with diplomatic ingenuity. "I should think it very likely."

"It will be a long time before he can come back to the theatre?" she asked again.

"There is no doubt about that."

"But his voice will be all right when he gets well?"

"Dr. Whitsen seems to think so."

She stood undecided for a moment; then she said—

"Well, I won't write until you give me leave. I don't mind your seeing the letter, when I do. In the meantime, will you tell Lionel how awfully glad I am that he is going on well; and that we shall all be glad to have him back at the theatre?"

"I will give him the message."

"Thanks—good-bye!" And therewithal Miss Burgoyne and her brother Jim withdrew.

But if Maurice set his face against that young lady being allowed to see Lionel in his present exhausted condition, it was quite otherwise with his notions about Nina. He talked to the three doctors, and to Mrs. Moore, and to Francie—to Francie most of all; and he maintained that so far from such a meeting causing any mental disturbance, the knowledge that Nina was in London,

was close by, would only be a source of joy and placid congratulation and peace. They yielded at last; and the experiment was to be tried on the Saturday morning about eleven. Nina was told. She trembled a little; but was ready to do whatever was required of her.

"Well, now," said Maurice to her, when she came up that morning (he noticed that she was dressed with extreme neatness and grace, and also that she seemed pale and careworn, though her beautiful dark eyes had lost none of their soft lustre). "We mustn't startle him. We must lead up to his seeing you. I wonder whether your playing those Neapolitan airs may not have left some impression on his brain?—they might sound familiar?—"

At once Nina went to the piano, and silently opened it.

"I will go and talk to him," he whispered. "Just you play a little, and we'll see."

Mangan went into the next room, and began to say a few casual words, in a careless kind of way, but all the time keeping watchful and furtive observation of his friend's face. And even as he spoke there came another sound—soft and low and distant—that seemed to say: *A la finestra affacciate*

*. . . nennela de stu core . . . io t'aggio addì che
spasemo, ma spasemo d'amore . . . e cchiù non trovo
requia, nennella mia, ppe te ! . . .*

"Maurice!" said Lionel, with staring eyes.
"What is that! Who is there?"

"Don't you know, Linn?" his friend said, tranquilly. "She has been here all through your illness—she has played those airs for you—"

"Nina? Nina herself?" Lionel exclaimed, but in a low voice.

"Yes. If you like I will bring her in to see you. She has been awfully good. I thought it would please you to know she was here. Now be quite quiet, and she will come in and speak to you for a minute—for just a minute, you know—"

He went and asked Nina to go into the room; but he did not accompany her: he remained without. Nina went gently forward to the bedside.

"Leo, I—I am glad you are getting on so well," she said, with admirable self-possession: it was only her lips that were tremulous.

As for him, he looked at her in silence; and tears rolled down his cheek—he was so nerveless. Then he said in his weak voice—

"Nina, have you forgiven me?"

"What have I to forgive, Leo?" she made

answer; and she took his hand for a moment. "Get well—it is the prayer of many friends. And if you wish to see me again before I go, then I will come—"

"Before you go?" he managed to say. "You are going away again, Nina?"

His eyes were more piteous than his speech: she met that look—and her resolution faltered.

"At least," she said, "I will not go until you are well—no. When you wish for me, I will come to see you. We are still friends as of old, Leo, are we not? Now I must not remain. I will say good-bye for the present."

"When are you coming back, Nina?" he said, still with those pleading eyes.

"When you wish, Leo."

"This afternoon?"

"This afternoon, if you wish."

She pressed his hand and left. Her determined self-possession had carried her bravely so far: there had hardly been a trace of emotion. But when she went outside—when the strain was taken off—it may have been otherwise: at all events, when with bowed and averted head, she crossed the sitting-room and betook herself to the empty chamber above, no one dreamed of following her—

until Francie, some little time thereafter, went quietly upstairs, and tapped at the door, and entered. She found Nina stretched at full length on the sofa, her head buried in the cushion, sobbing as if her heart would break. Perhaps she was thinking of the approaching farewell.

CHAPTER IX.

TOWARDS THE DAWN.

On the Tuesday about mid-day, according to her promise, Miss Burgoyne called, and again preferred her request. And, short of a downright lie, Mangan saw no way of refusing her.

"At the same time," he said, in the cold manner which he unconsciously adopted towards this young lady, "you must remember he is far from strong yet; and I hope you have nothing to say to him that would cause agitation, or even involve his speaking much. His voice has to be taken care of, as well as his general condition."

"Oh, you may trust me for that," said she, with decision. "Do you think *I* don't know how important that is?"

Miss Burgoyne went into the room. Lionel was still in bed, but propped up in a sitting posture; and to keep his arms and shoulders warm he had

donned a gorgeous smoking-jacket, the fantastic colours of which were hardly in keeping with his character as invalid. He knew of her arrival, and had laid aside the paper he had been reading.

"I am so glad to know you are getting on so satisfactorily," said Miss Burgoyne, in her most pleasant way. "And they tell me your voice will be all right too. Of course you must exercise great caution: it will be some time before you can begin your *vocalises* again."

"How is Doyle doing?" he asked, in a fairly clear voice.

"Oh, pretty well," said she, but in rather a dissatisfied fashion. "It is difficult to say what it is that is wanting—he looks well, acts well, sings well—a very good performance altogether—and yet—it is respectable, and nothing more. He really has a good voice, as you know, and thoroughly well trained; but it seems to me as if there were in his singing everything but the one thing—everything but the thrill that makes your breath stop at times. However," added Miss Burgoyne, out of her complaisance, "the public will wait a long time before they find any one to sing '*The Starry Night*' as you sang it, and as I hope you'll be singing it again before long."

She was silent for a second or two; she seemed to have something to say, and yet to hesitate about saying it.

"I hear you are going to Italy when you are strong enough to travel," she observed at last.

"That is what they advise."

"You will be away for some time."

"I suppose so."

And again she sat silent for a little while, pulling at the fringe of her rose-lined sun-shade.

"Well, Lionel," she said at length, with down-cast eyes, "there is something I have been thinking about for a long time back; and if you are going away very soon, and perhaps for a considerable while, I ought to tell you. It may be a relief to you as well as to me; indeed I think it will; if I had imagined what I have to say would vex you in any way, you may be sure I wouldn't come at such a time as this. But to be frank—that engagement—do you think we entered upon it with any kind of wisdom, or with any fair prospect of happiness? Now if I trouble you or hurt your feelings in any way, you can stop me with a single word," she interposed, and she ventured to look up a little, and to address him more directly. "The truth is, I was flattered by such a proposal—

—naturally—and rather lost my head, perhaps, when I ought to have asked myself what was the true state of our feelings towards each other. Of course, it was I who was in the wrong ; I ought to have considered. And I must say you have behaved most honourably throughout ; you never showed the least sign of a wish to break the engagement, even when we had our little quarrels, and you may have received some provocation. But after all, Lionel, I think you must admit that our relations have not been quite—quite—what you might expect between two people looking forward to spending their lives together.”

She paused here—perhaps to give him an opportunity of signifying his assent. But he refused to do that. He uttered not a word. It was for her to say what was in her mind—if she wished to be released.

“ I am quite sure that even now, even after what I have just told you,” she continued, “ you would be willing to keep your word. But—but would it be wise ? Just think. Esteem, and regard, and respect there would always be between us, I hope ; but—but is that enough ? Of course you may tell me that as you are willing to fulfil your part of the engagement, so I should be on my side ; and I

don't say that I am not: if you challenged me, and could convince me that your happiness depended on it, you would see whether I would draw back. But you have heard me so far without a word of protest. I have not wounded you. Perhaps you will be as glad to be free as I shall be—I don't mean glad, Lionel," she hastily put in, "except in the sense of being free from an obligation that might prove disastrous to both of us. Now, Lionel, what do you say? You see I have been quite candid; and I hope you won't think I have spoken out of any unkindness or ill-feeling."

He answered her at last.

"I agree with every word you have said."

A quick flush swept across Miss Burgoyne's forehead; but probably he could not have told what that meant, even if he had been looking; and he was not.

"I hope you won't think me unkind," she repeated. "I am sure it will be better for both of us to have that tie broken. If I had not thought that it would be as grateful to you as to me to be released, be sure I would not have come and spoken to you while you were lying on a sick-bed. Now I promised Mr. Mangan not to talk too much nor to agitate you," said she, as she rose, and

smoothed her sun-shade, and made ready to depart. "I hope you will get strong and well very soon ; and that you will come back to the New Theatre with your voice as splendid as ever." But still she lingered a little. She felt that her immediate departure might seem too abrupt ; it would look as if she had secured the object of her visit, and was therefore ready to run away at once. So she chatted a little further ; and looked at the photographs on the wall ; and again she hoped he would be well soon, and back at the theatre. At last she said, " Well, good-bye ! " ; gave him her gloved hand for a second ; then she went out and was joined by her brother. Mangan saw them both down-stairs, and returned to Lionel's room.

" Had her ladyship any important communication to make ? " he asked, in his careless way.

" She proposed that our engagement should be broken off—and I consented," said Lionel, simply.

Mangan, who was going to the window, suddenly stood stock still, and stared, as if he had not heard aright.

" And it is broken off ? " he exclaimed.

" Yes."

There was a dead silence. Presently Maurice said——

"Well, that is the best piece of news I have received for many a day—for you don't seem heart-broken, Linn! And now—have you any plans?—perhaps you have hardly had time——"

He was looking at Lionel—wondering whether the same idea was in both their heads—and yet afraid to speak.

"Maurice," Lionel said presently, with some hesitation, "tell me—could I ask Nina—look at me—such a wreck—could I ask her to become my wife? It's about Capri I am thinking—we could go together there, when I am a bit stronger——"

There was a flash of satisfaction in the deep-set, friendly grey eyes.

"This is what I expected, Linn. Well, put the question to herself—and the sooner the better!"

"Yes, but—" Lionel said, as if afraid.

"Oh, I know," Maurice said, confidently. "Tell Nina that you are not yet quite recovered—that you have need of her care—and she will go to the world's end with you. Only you must get married first, for the sake of appearances."

"What will she say, Maurice?" he asked again, as if there was some curious doubt, or perhaps merely timidity, in his mind.

"I think I know, but I am not going to tell," his

friend answered lightly. "I am off up-stairs now. I will send Nina down; but without a word of warning. You'll have to lead up to it yourself—and good-luck to you, my boy!" And therewith Maurice departed to seek out Nina in the chamber above; and as he went up the stairs he was saying to himself—"Well, well; and so Miss Burgoyne did that of her own free will? I may have done the young woman some injustice. Perhaps she is not so selfish and hard after all. Wish I had been more civil to her!"

Meanwhile Miss Burgoyne and her brother were walking in the direction of Regent Street.

"Now, Jim," she said, with almost a gay air, "I have just completed a most delicate and difficult negotiation, and I feel quite exhausted. You must take me into a restaurant and give me the very nicest and neatest bit of *lucheon* you can possibly devise—all pretty little trifles, for we mustn't interfere with dinner: and I am going to see how you can do it——"

"Well, but, Katie," he said, frowning, "where do you suppose——"

"Oh, don't be stupid!" she exclaimed, slipping her purse into his hand. "I am going to judge of your *savoir faire*; I will see whether you get a nice

table; whether you order the proper things; whether you command sufficient attention——”

“I was never taught to bully waiters,” said he.

“To bully waiters!—is that your notion of *savoir faire*?” she answered cheerfully. “My dear Jim, the bullying of a waiter is the most obvious and outward sign of the ingrained, incurable cad. No, no. That is what I do not expect of you, Jim. And I am going to leave the whole affair in your hands; for while you are ordering for me a most elegant little luncheon, I have an extremely important letter to send off.”

So it was that when brother and sister were seated at a small table on the ground floor of a well-known Regent Street restaurant, Miss Burgoyne had writing materials brought her, and she wrote her letter while Jim was in shy confabulation with the waiter. It was not a lengthened epistle: it ran so——

‘Tuesday,

DEAR PERCY,

Let it be as you wish.

Your loving

KATE.

P.S. When shall you be in town? Come and see me.’

She folded and enclosed and addressed the letter ; but she did not give it to the waiter to post. It was of too great moment for that. She put it in her pocket : she would herself see it safely dispatched.

Well, for a boy, Jim had not done so badly ; though, to be sure, his sister did not seem to pay much attention to these delicacies. Her brain was too busy. As she trifled with this thing or that, or sipped a little wine, she said—

“ Jim, I know what the dream of your life is—it's to go to a big pheasant-shoot.”

“ Oh, is it ! ” he said, with the scorn born of superior knowledge. “ Not much. I've tried my hand at pheasants. I know what they are. It's all very well for those fellows in the papers to talk about the easy shooting—the slaughter—the tame birds—and all that bosh : fellows who couldn't hit a stuffed cockatoo at twenty yards. No, thanks : I know what pheasants are—the beasts ! ”

“ Well, what kind of shooting would you really like ? ” said this indulgent sister.

“ I'll tell you,” he said, with his face brightening. “ I should like to have the run of a good rabbit-warren, and to be allowed to wander about entirely by myself, with a gun and a spaniel. No keeper

looking on, and worrying, and criticising—that's my idea."

"All right," said she, "I think I can promise you that."

"You?" he said, looking at her, and wondering if she had gone out of her wits.

"Yes," she answered, sweetly. "Don't you think there will be plenty of rabbits about a place like Petmansworth?"

"And what then?"

"Well, I'm going to marry Sir Percival Miles," said Miss Kate, with much serene complacency.

CHAPTER X.

A REÛNION.

HERE is a long balcony, shaded by pillared arches, the windows hung with loose blinds of reeds in grey and scarlet. If you adventure out into the hot sunlight, you may look away down the steep and rugged hill, where there are groups of flat-roofed, white houses dotted here and there among the dark palms and olives and arbour'd vines; and then your eyes naturally turn to the vast extent of shimmering blue sea, with the faint outline of the Italian coast and the peaked Vesuvius beyond. But inside, in the spacious, rather bare, rooms, it is cooler. And in one of these, at the further end, stands a young man in front of a piano, striking a chord from time to time, and exercising a voice that does not seem to have lost much of its *timbre*; while there is an exceedingly pretty, gentle-eyed, rather foreign-looking young

lady engaged in putting flowers on the central table, which is neatly and primly laid out for four.

"Come, Leo," she says, "is it not enough? You are in too great a hurry, I believe. Are you jealous of Mr. Doyle? Do you wish to go back at once? No, no; we must get Mr. Mangan and his bride to make a long stay, before we go over with them to the big towns on the mainland. Will you go out and see if the *Risposta* is visible yet?"

"What splendid weather for Maurice and Francie, isn't it, Ntoniella?" said he (for there are other pet names besides the familiar Nina for anyone called Antonia). "I wish we could have had our wedding-day along with theirs. Well, at least we will have our honeymoon-trip along with them; and we shall have to be their guides, you know, in Venice, and Rome, and Florence, for neither of them knows much Italian."

"Yes, but, Leo," said Nina, who was still busy with her flowers, "when we go back with them to Naples, you really must speak properly. It is too bad—the dialect—it is not necessary—you can speak well if you wish—it was only to make fun of Sabetta that you began—now it is always."

He only laughed at her grave remonstrance.

"Oh, don't you preach at me, Ntoniella!" he

said, in the very language she was deprecating. "There are lots of things I can say to you that sound nicer that way."

He turned from the piano at last, and took up an English newspaper that he had previously opened.

"Ntoniè, tell me, did you read all the news this morning?"

"No—a little," Nina answered, snipping off the redundant stalks of the grapes.

"You did not see the announcement about—about Miss Cunyngham?"

At the mention of this name, Nina looked up quickly; and there was some colour in the pale clear complexion.

"No. What is it, Leo?"

"I thought you might have seen that, at all events," he said, lightly. "Well, I will read it to you. 'A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Lord Rockminster, eldest son of the Earl of Fareborough, and Miss Honnor Cunyngham, daughter of the late Sir George Cunyngham, and sister of Sir Hugh Cunyngham, of the Braes, Perthshire, and Aivron Lodge, Campden Hill.' I should like to have sent them a little wedding-present," he went on,

absently, "for both of them have been very kind to me; but I am grown penurious in my old age; I suppose we shall have to consider every farthing for many a day to come—"

"Leo, why will you not take any of my money?" Nina exclaimed—but with shy and downcast face.

"Your money!" he said, laughing. "You talk as if you were a Russian princess, Ntoniella!"

He drew aside the reeded blind of one of the windows and went out into the soft air: both land and sea—that beautiful stretch of shining blue—seemed quivering in the heat and abundant sunlight of June.

"Nina, Nina!" he called, "you must make haste; the *Risposta* will soon be coming near; and we must be down in time to welcome Maurice and Francie when they come ashore."

In a second or two she was ready; and he also.

"There are so many things I shall have to tell Maurice," he said, just as they were about to leave the house. "But do you think I shall be able to tell him, Ntoniella? No. He must guess. What you have been to me—what you are to me—how can I tell him, or any one?"

He took both her hands in his, and looked long and lovingly into her upturned face.

"*Ntoniè, tu si state a sciorta mia!*" he said, meaning thereby that good fortune had befallen him at last. It was a pretty speech; and Nina, with her beautiful dark eyes fixed on his, answered him in the same dialect, and almost in the same terms—if in a lower voice—

"*E a sciorta mia si tu!*"

THE END.

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